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105

Sparrow in Search of Expulsion

*Being the Plain Truth, now Revealed
for the first time; of the efforts made by
Thomas Whitcombe Shirley Sparrow
to be Expelled
from
Castlegate School*

Recorded by GUNBY HADATH

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Chapter I

In which Sparrow would Change Places with Casabianca

IN the intervals of battling with indigestion, Mr. Eggett instructed Castlegate in mathematics, and, having concluded that, much as he loathed exercise, he must take a little lawn tennis this summer for his stomach's sake, he was studying the catalogue of a local outfitter with a view to the selection of flannel trousers, when he was interrupted by the appearance of Sparrow.

"Yes?" he inquired impatiently. "Did you knock?"

His visitor's reply was a gloomy "Yes, sir." He was a small youth whom you would not have looked at twice unless you had chanced to remark the freshness of his complexion, which was a singularly delicate pink and white, and his regularly fashioned eyebrows of light brown, so regular, indeed, that they might have been pencilled or gummed on. Having observed so far you would have gone on to be struck by the expression of melancholy which chastened his face.

"Well?" said Mr. Eggett.

"Sir," said Sparrow, with a rush, "I am not

happy. I am out of my element, sir, at Castlegate."

"A fish out of water, eh? And what is your grievance?"

"I think, sir," Sparrow answered, without animation, "that I should not feel comfortable at any school. I am not cut out, sir, for school life. It does not agree with me."

"Agree with you!" Mr. Eggett repeated sourly. "But why do you come to me with this silliness?"

"Because, sir, you are next in authority to the Head."

"You talk like a book, Sparrow. And what do you want me to do?"

"If you please, sir, I want you to ask the Head to expel me."

The words almost brought Mr. Eggett out of his chair, and, wondering if this were some new species of jest, he stared at the pink-and-white face, but its melancholy eyes met him squarely.

"And how long have you been here?" he asked at last.

"Sir, this is my third term!" was the dismal response.

"Your third term! Have you informed your parents of your feelings?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what do they say?"

Sparrow hesitated. "They say I have got to stick it. They won't remove me. That's why I have come to you."

"You think if I ask the Head——"

"Yes, sir," Sparrow broke in, his face at last eager. "You could easily tell the Head, sir, that I'm doing no good."

"Very easily," Mr. Eggett agreed dryly.

"Quite, sir. Then he'd take your advice and expel me. You might beg of him to expel me, sir. If you please, sir."

Mr. Eggett groaned and returned to his catalogue. "Run away and shake yourself down," he commanded. "You don't complain, I suppose, of your treatment here?"

"No, sir," said Sparrow, more lugubriously than before, and moved to the door, where for an instant he paused to cast one lingering and reproachful look over his shoulder.

As he took his dreary way he deliberated on the shortcomings of our system of education. That a fellow should be dumped down willy-nilly in a herd to do as the herd did or be smitten seemed an entire negation of free will. He began to schedule his day. "At seven in the morning," he said, "which is only six o'clock by the real time, I have to get up just when I am healthily asleep and jump into a tub most unhealthily cold. At half-past seven, on an empty stomach, I learn tripe by heart. At eight o'clock I munch what they call breakfast. From nine to twelve I am supposed to be interested in such tommyrot as the date of the Diet of Worms, and——" At

which instant the bell for prep. broke in discordantly.

He took his place at his desk beneath the high window, and resolved to make a last appeal to his people. He opened wide his Latin dictionary, and, building a little battlement or screen of books, drew out a fair sheet of foolscap, squared his elbows, and began.

His task when he had finished should have shown the Latin equivalent of that Eleventh Exercise of Arnold, which tells how some unnamed gentleman pretended that he had met the man who had killed the king by poison. But with Sparrow it read like this:—

DEAREST MOTHER,—

I write to tell you I am no better and my chest is very sore. I think it must be the air here and the chalk in the school water which ought to be boiled or filted but isn't i'm sure. I am very sorry I am costing you and father so much but I do not think school is any good. Willett, one of the fellows, borrowed my camera to make a musicle box and he can't make the inside fit again. I hope Mabel's cold is better. I am glad she is not at school. I think I have caught consumption. Will you send me a book called A Happy Sunset its all about a boy who got hit by a cricket ball and a disease set in and he died peacably. Its wonderful I don't get hit by a cricket ball so

many fellows smack them all over the shop at practice. I don't think the food is good but I should not mind if I was stronger. I will send you a piece of meat off the beef one day and you will see how stringy it is always like that. I hope you and father are well and won't mind my being so uncomfortable because I don't think I shall last long. Please send me some more money. None of the masters here can teach you properly, but old Eggett who does things called Surds is the worst I think. Please send me five shillings as I've lent three and six to Willett and I'll want some lozenges when my cough gets more hacking.

So absorbed had Sparrow been on his letter that he had been unconscious of a spare, angular figure which had stood behind him while he finished it off. Sparrow's first notification took the form of a sour command to show up his work.

Very readily Sparrow proffered his Arnold. Mr. Eggett waved it aside. Sparrow then handed his exercise-book and the dictionary. Mr. Eggett smiled grimly. Next, his lean fingers shot forth and grasped the foolscap, which, adjusting his glasses, he proceeded to read.

"Come with me," he commanded, when he had finished.

Back again in the study so recently left, Sparrow waited the issue quite placidly. He stood like a

Stoic, his pink-and-white features unpaled. Till all at once his pensive and melancholy eyes lit up with a gleam, as it occurred to him that his allusion to Mr. Eggett might do the trick, and induce the latter to demand his expulsion. What if he should secure by a mere fluke the boon which intercession had failed to wring?

"You are pleased to smile, Sparrow?"

"Sir, I didn't know I was smiling," said Sparrow.

"You go into prep——"

"The bell rang, sir, so I had to," Sparrow protested, in the tone of one rebutting a false accusation.

"Don't be impertinent. Impertinence won't help you. You go into prep., and, instead of doing your work, you write an alarming and libellous screed to your mother, every word of which is an utter falsehood."

"Willett did borrow my camera," said Sparrow, reproachfully.

Mr. Eggett fingered his beard with a tart smile. "And if it did not sound like abetting a felony, I would hope that he never returned your three shillings and sixpence."

"He won't, sir," said Sparrow.

Tearing the sheet of foolscap into fragments, Mr. Eggett flung them into his waste-paper basket. Then he bent over the outfitting catalogue on his blotting-pad, and blue-pencilled the block of the

flannels he had selected. He turned the pages, arriving at tennis rackets, and studied these ostentatiously for some minutes. He was giving himself time, as was his habit, to reflect what he should do with this extraordinary young person, who waited at a rigid and sombre attention.

"Don't stand like a vacuous image, Sparrow," he snapped. Then, after another pause: "To-morrow is Saturday."

Sparrow said nothing.

"Surds," said Mr. Eggett, "are not without attraction if you approach them, Sparrow, from the right view-point. To-morrow afternoon, then, when you have finished the Latin prose which you should have done this evening, you will try your 'prentice hand on Surds. See what you make of chapter thirty-four of Mr. Todhunter's nice little 'Algebra for Beginners.'" He handed Sparrow the prune-coloured volume as he finished. "Immediately after call-over you will show me your efforts."

Sparrow still held his peace.

"You understand?" said Mr. Eggett, more sharply. "You share, I believe, a study with Hebblethwaite. I think it's a pity that you juniors at Castlegate have studies, and if I had my way I might change it; but that's immaterial. Well, you will work in your study till call-over. You quite understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Sparrow.

II

On Saturday morning Mr. Eggett's indigestion was acute. It had never troubled him more. He dragged down to breakfast with the mien of a martyr, snapped at Mr. Campbell, who asked him to pass the toast, and swept a choleric way through morning school. This was doubly unfortunate, because the day was so beautiful that it might have moved him in a more equable frame to remove the ban of close confinement laid upon Sparrow in exchange for some healthier penalty. Indeed, towards twelve o'clock, and the end of third lesson, as great splashes of sunshine sprawled themselves over the desks, and through the open windows the birds sang their souls out, Mr. Eggett did permit his mind for one instant to dwell upon some alteration of sentence. A twinge of pain coincided, and hardened his heart.

The melancholy subject of his thoughts was nourishing no resentment. He accepted it as quite in the order of things that he should spend a beastly afternoon in his beastly study. It may be said at once that he did not intend to make any attempt to probe the mystery of Surds, which he dismissed as being quite as irrational as Mr. Eggett's methods of punishment. Ruminating thus, as they came out of third lesson, he bent his brooding steps past the porter's lodge towards the avenue.

He went that way to avoid the attentions of Willett, who, as experience taught him, would be seeking him in a few minutes to borrow a shilling. Willett generally did his borrowing on Saturdays. Here, at the end of the avenue under the trees, where the fellows came on home-match days to watch the road for their people who might turn up to see the cricket, he felt safe enough from Willett till dinner-time, because, as he never came here as a rule, Willett would not think of it till too late. He felt just a little tinge of almost happiness as he pictured Willett, desperate, searching for him. When suddenly he heard the mendicant's voice.

Willett had not seen him, but was calling, and undoubtedly approaching, as he could judge. Without a moment's hesitation, and with no one to gainsay, he slipped into the road and round the bend. The road was white, and it wound, and on either side the hedges were friendly and fragrant; and Sparrow went on. He had gone perhaps two hundred yards without meeting a soul, when he came to something which brought him up inquisitively.

This was a cycle-carrier, such as tradesmen use, propped against a gate and quite unattended. On it in large lettering was painted:—

BRACKELL & SONS

OUTFITTERS AND ALL SPORTS REQUISITES.

So far, here was nothing at all arresting, but what puzzled Sparrow was why it was left to look after itself with a parcel so large that half was inside the carrier, and the other half propped up the lid.

A minute's examination answered his first question. One of the wheels had come off, and the errand boy, caught napping, had gone to Speakman's garage to fetch someone to replace it. So far, so bad. Sparrow felt sorry for the lad ; but whatever was in that enormously big parcel ? He sniffed at it, and fingered the twine gingerly.

Sparrow was inquisitive. He dwelt on that parcel, pressing its contour with the palms of his hands, till presently, after a hurried glance up and down, he made a hole in the paper and attached his eye. What he saw sent him back with a quick catch of breath ; but next moment he actually smiled, and sat down in the road.

He was thinking. He thought best squatting down, with his legs crossed like a tailor's, and his head in his hands. It did not in the least concern him that the bank on which he sat was extremely dusty ; what concerned him was—how long had the errand boy been gone ? For the longer he had been gone, the sooner he would be back ; but Speakman's garage was in the opposite direction to the School. Still, assuming that he, Sparrow, had plenty of time, could he——

One thing at a time, he told himself logically.

First, was the parcel too heavy for him to carry? It was no good borrowing a thing he couldn't lug back; whereat he rose and extended his arms round the parcel. It was very light, and came easily to his embrace.

Next, could he cut back across the field and get the parcel safely into the School and his study? Well, the only way to answer this question was to try it, and, seeing no signs of the errand boy, off he set. What Sparrow's mental make-up lacked in sociability it appears to have found in a talent for quick decision, and if he was not gregarious, he was brisk. Fortune favours the brave, and it favoured Sparrow.

Ten minutes later the door of his study was bolted, and behind it he was undoing a large package, rejoicing that a chill had removed Hebblethwaite to the sick-room, and so given him undivided possession of their quarters.

Said he: "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good."

III

After dinner Mr. Eggett felt very much better. He had sipped some hot water at half-past twelve, and confined himself to rice pudding at dinner-time, and felt quite equal now, after half a pipe, to a walk down into the town for those tennis flannels.

He had decided on a grey instead of a white,

because grey kept clean longer and cost no more ; but he kept an open mind on the brand of racket, which he would leave to Brackell & Sons to select for him. He would want white canvas shoes, too, he reflected, and—yes, a belt or sash, he supposed, for his waist. He would like School colours, of course, but as he had never yet played a game he felt a little shy of adopting the School sash.

So presently he found the outfitting catalogue, and reached for his hat in that pleasurable anticipation which is quite the best part of setting out to buy things. It occurred to him then that if he went by the terrace he would pass the window of Sparrow's study, and could glance through the pane to see the young man at his Surds. No idea of freeing the captive remained in his mind as he strode off, wondering if lawn tennis was really a hard game.

His feet were presently crushing the gravel by the terrace, but their crunch did not disturb the rigid figure which pored, with its back to the window, over its books. The prisoner seemed engrossed and absorbed in his task ; and Mr. Eggett, after a cursory glance, crunched on his way with a twinge of compunction for spying. But this he dismissed as he passed down the avenue, and decided that the School sash it should be. And the First Eleven tie ? Well, would it look swanking ?

Pursuing his gentle way, his digestion for-

gotten, at peace with the world, in the avenue we leave Mr. Eggett; to hasten ahead in pursuit of a small figure which, immediately dinner was over, had dashed away, and had now been in the town quite twenty minutes. We come up with Sparrow at a pastrycook's, whence he emerged removing flakes of three-corner from his lips, and grateful that Willett had not secured his last shilling. Thence he crossed the road by the post office, and nosed for a while the window where they sell fishing-tackle, before turning to the establishment at the corner which bore the legend, "G. Brackell & Sons, Outfitters."

Sparrow paused and regarded the plate-glass windows. One in the side street was occupied entirely by boots—black boots, brown boots, buttoned boots, buckskin boots, all kinds of boots. But the other and larger window, which faced the High Street, displayed the wide range of Brackell & Sons' summer suitings, the excellence of their gentlemen's ready-made suits, the style with economy of their bespoke tailoring, and the readiness to wear of their school outfits. There were flannels in this window, of grey and white, and sweaters, ribbed and unribbed, and gorgeous blazers. Just in the centre of the window was a blank space, a little island in a sea of raiment.

Sparrow entered Messrs. Brackell & Sons, and in his dismal tones asked to see Mr. Brackell. Being assured by the gentleman in a frock-coat

whom he addressed—and whose face revealed good nature if a face ever did—that certainly he could *not* see Mr. Brackell, unless he followed him to a happier world, but that he was speaking to Mr. Brackell's unworthy successor, who assured him of his best attention at all times, coupled with the widest range in suitings, Sparrow broke the peroration to inquire *why* a blank space had been left in the window.

The face of Mr. Brackell & Sons fell at once, and he indicated a red-eyed youth at the counter.

“Because,” he replied, “that careless lout loses my property.”

“Yes?” said Sparrow, inquiringly. “How interesting!”

“Interesting!” cried Mr. Brackell & Sons, who liked to hear his own voice when business was slack, as it always was after Saturday noon till the evening. “That space in the window was reserved for the finest wax figure you ever saw, my friend.”

“A dummy, eh? To hang your suits on,” said Sparrow.

“That's right. Its joints bend, elbows and knees, you know, and it bends at the waist, what many of 'em don't. It's the latest design. It arrived by rail from the manufacturers to-day. Like life, it is. You couldn't tell the difference!”

“And when are you going to perform the unveiling ceremony?”

"When I've found it," said Mr. Brackell & Sons.

"Oh, you've lost it, then. Did it jump from the train?"

A plump but accusing thumb was jerked at the shop boy, whose red eyes were now bent over a box of ties. "Ask him!" growled the finger's owner. "He fetched it from the station. It jumped out of his carrier somewhere or other."

"But perhaps," said Sparrow, gently, "it's only borrowed."

The successor of the departed Mr. Brackell passed his fingers between his collar and neck and gracefully flicked the moisture on to the floor. "It's hot!" he explained, "the hottest day that we've had. Borrowed my lay figure! What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Sparrow, "*I* borrowed it."

And while the outfitter's face grew redder and redder, Sparrow explained the episode of the cycle-van and the parcel, with a promise to return the loan on Monday if the red-eyed youth would meet him at the avenue gate before dinner.

"Mr. Brackell," we say at once, took it very well. His face had not belied its stamp of good nature. He was tickled with the audacity of his customer, as it now amused him to term Sparrow. But Monday, he expostulated, wouldn't help him, for he wanted to dress his figure for this evening's brisk trade. And all at once he stopped short,

but he kept his mouth open, and riveted his eyes on Sparrow's pink cheeks, on his regularly pencilled eyebrows, and pink complexion.

"By gum!" he exclaimed, "you're like a waxwork yourself! No offence, but I've never seen anything nearer. In my window there, in a blazer and a cap and white bags, I'd defy them to detect the difference if you kept still." He called the pink-eyed youth. "What say, Joe?" he said. "Shall we put him in the window to pay him back?"

It is likely that our outfitter spoke in jest. But Sparrow, as has been seen, was a man of brisk mind, who rarely wasted time on thinking twice. And scarcely had the words left the other's lips than Sparrow, without the slightest change of expression, removed his coat and waistcoat, and, unbuttoning his collar, remarked:—

"Mr. Brackell, I'd like to see how it feels."

"You would?" replied the outfitter, with a great laugh. "Then come into my fitting-room, and we'll dress you. Joe, keep your eye on the shop. This way, young gentleman."

Maybe the successor of the late Brackell was not entirely disingenuous in his ready compliance. Perhaps he was reflecting astutely enough that were Sparrow detected he would profit; that a "college boy" had posed as a dummy in his shop would be no mean advertisement, adroitly employed. But, whatever his motive, the fact

remains that a minute or two afterwards he returned to the counter carrying a stiff and motionless figure, the legs whereof projected rigidly, and the head of which was crowned in a green cricket cap. For the rest, it was clad in a blazer of vivid scarlet, a blue-and-white shirt, white flannels immaculately creased and maintained by a snake-belt, and a pair of buckskin boots.

In this guise they deposited Sparrow in the window, in the little island in its sea of suitings and raiment, and from the wrist of one of his bent arms they hung a card which stated in gilt lettering :—

EVERY REQUISITE FOR SPORT.
Unsurpassed Quality.

Then Mr. Brackell in his shirt-sleeves stooped before him, and crossed his other arm across his body to insert a tennis racket between forearm and breast.

Sparrow's first sensations were disquieting. In the glare of the sunshine he wanted badly to blink, and his legs began to tickle ; he wished, too, to sneeze. By his right ear hung from a hook a cluster of snake-belts, fellows to the one which was clipping his waist rather tightly ; his companion on the left was a ready-made tweed which emitted an abominable aroma. He felt oddly and disagreeably conscious of the propinquity of shirts in stripes and spotted shirts and festoons of ties, and he itched to duck his head

and run amuck. But he held on bravely, standing as stiff as iron, his chin well up, his dismal features rigid. It is not surprising that a prim old lady, having paused to regard him severely on her way to the dressmaker, declared to that functionary while presently being tried-on that she'd just seen the miserablest dummy in Brackell's window ! "As a rule, my dear," she explained, "they make 'em too simpering."

Brackell's new figure certainly was not simpering. True, it seized its chance directly the old lady had passed to scratch its nose, across which a fly was strolling, but this brought no relief to its pained features. Eyes straight ahead, it reflected on Casabianca and wondered if his deck was as hot as the window ?

Facing the High Street, Sparrow could not see the entrance to his establishment, which was at the corner ; but his ears were sharp, and he caught quite distinctly a voice in the regions behind him inquiring for flannels. There was no mistaking accents he knew so well.

"I want," Mr. Eggett was saying, "these flannels in your catalogue. I shall also require some rubber shoes and a sash. You have—er—the School colours, I suppose, Mr. Brackell ?"

The genial outfitter became all obsequiousness. "And your size, sir ?" he inquired, producing the flannels, and despatching Joe for shoes with a rare bustle. It was not often he had the honour

of serving "the college," which has its official suppliers of colours in London, so he handled Mr. Eggett with reverence, and strewed his counter with all the hues of the rainbow.

"And the next, if you please, sir?" he said, ere the parcel was packed.

"Oh, a lawn-tennis racket," said Mr. Eggett. He paused to cough nervously. "I am—er—a trifle rusty—out of practice, you know—so I will ask you to select the racket for me. I rely on your judgment."

"Couldn't rely on a better, sir, though I say it myself. Joe, my lad, what do I know about tennis rackets?"

"All that's worth knowing," responded the untruthful Joe.

His employer led to the door. "Step this way, sir," he said. "I've a show of this season's rackets in the window, and I'd like you——"

But there he stopped short, for recollection rushed over him. In the excitement of serving this august customer he had forgotten his latest model in window dummies. And, being a kindly soul, he was prompted at once to arrest an inspection which must reveal the truth.

"One moment, sir!" he implored. "Joe, did you move those rackets out of the window?"

"Aye!" Joe cried, immediately; this time *splendide mendax*.

"Where did we move 'em to, Joe?"

But Joe, though he could second a fib well, was not of the inventive faculty. He scratched his head, and looked at his master appealingly, before murmuring something which sounded like "The coal cellar."

"Well, never mind," said Mr. Eggett, kindly. "But I dare say you have one or two left in the window."

And before they could reply he swung briskly out of the door, and halted before the exhibition of suitings.

His eye roved them till it caught the racket, clasped in the stiff embrace of the agonized dummy, staring with vacant gaze above his head. It tingled, and distinctly felt its spine creep, the consequence of shock rather than alarm. And its neighbour, the ready-made suit, smelled fustier than ever.

Mr. Eggett allowed his eyes to lift to its face. At which instant its mouth and nose began to twist, and it sneezed.

* * * * *

"And now," inquired Mr. Eggett that evening, "did you leave the real dummy in your study to deceive me if I glanced in?" As he spoke he restored his cane to the cupboard.

"Not quite, sir," said Sparrow, blowing upon his palms. "But it sort of looked nice there."

"Well, tell me what possessed you to play such a prank?"

Sparrow eyed him drearily, and when he replied it was in the pious tone of depressed resignation. "Because, sir," he said, "I thought I might get expelled."

Mr. Eggett's indigestion was certainly better. "Ah," he said lightly, "you must try again, Sparrow."

Chapter II

The Proof Direct

TO Mr. Eggett the whole idea was abominable. That at his time of life, and with his digestion, he should be called upon to inaugurate and take for two hours every week a class upon business subjects (he declined flatly to term them "commercial") seemed the height of the inappropriate and the unkind; inappropriate, because he knew nothing about business, and unkind because there were younger men on the staff. But to his courteous hints in that direction the Head had turned a bland, unresponsive countenance; reflecting no doubt that by his virtues as an arithmetician Mr. Eggett was as well qualified as, for instance, the games master, to teach business, and that in bringing a virgin mind to the task he would be no more handicapped than would anyone else. So Mr. Eggett groaned gently, and shouldered his burden with all that courage that had animated him—alas! unavailingly—to begin lawn tennis as a cure for indigestion.

Thus, in deference to the spirit of the age, Castlegate, conservative of conservatives, had broken with tradition by means of a class wherein every Friday morning from ten to twelve some fifteen to twenty monarchs (in embryo) of industry groped among the mysteries of bills of lading, and drafts at ninety days' sight, and kindred *arcana*. The circumstance that a prize was attached at term's end for the best commercial paper formed very possibly a minute attraction beside the opportunities offered to enterprise. It was not that the Germs (as the class became known) were really sanguine of passing, viâ cultivation by Mr. Eggett, to the immediate management of banks and big companies, but because novelty will always repay pursuit, and there were reasons to anticipate compensations.

Of course, Willett lost no time in enrolling as a Germ, for he knew that business has to do with borrowing money, and panted to learn in how many ways it could be borrowed. But what was Sparrow doing among the fraternity?

You might have wondered, indeed, had you seen him this Friday. As pink-and-white as ever of countenance, his every aspect denoted the deepest despondency, as, elevating his eyebrows in tortured anguish, he contemplated the paper in front of him. This paper should have displayed two rows of figures which, totting up both sides to the same amount, would have been called a

"trial balance"; but all it showed, with ten minutes more to go, was an exclamation mark and a couple of blots. At our sufferer's right lay *Lyons on Book-keeping*; in front of him Grove's *Discount and Interest Tables*; on his left the assiduous Willett making audible additions, and behind him the lean shadow of Mr. Eggett.

"But, Sparrow," remarked the latter with some emphasis, "I spent all last lesson explaining a trial balance to you!"

"Yes, sir," said Sparrow.

"And that is all that you can make of it?"

Sparrow's hand slid from the desk to his waistcoat. "Sir," he sighed, "the food here disagrees with me. The harder I try to eat it, the iller I feel."

"But what has that to do with book-keeping?"

"I wish I knew, sir," was the even reply.

Mr. Eggett eyed him, and passed on. But when shortly after twelve o'clock, in high relief to have finished with the Germs for a week, he was back in his study and filling a pipe of consolation, the irritation which he had mastered in class returned in a gust with Sparrow's reappearance on the scene. Mr. Eggett barked a curt and testy interrogation.

"Me, sir?" remonstrated the intruder. "I don't want anything. My wants are very simple—just to fade away peacefully. But the Head wanted me to bring you these papers."

"What are they?"

“Reports about me, sir,” Sparrow said, proffering them.

As Mr. Eggett glanced through the papers he groaned. Here was a cheerless symposium of adverse reports from sundry masters on the attainments of Sparrow. It appeared that he was going from bad to worse; that his inattention was gross and his ignorance inexplicable; that he was idle, careless, and, to be quite brief, a pattern of everything the student should not be. It occurred to Mr. Eggett, as he read on, that Sparrow, on his unresting quest for removal, had hit upon a method more veiled and subtle than any he had yet employed.

“So!” he remarked at last. “These make sorry reading.”

“They do, indeed, sir,” said Sparrow.

“It looks as if you were not at all fit for Castle-gate.”

A spark of animation relieved Sparrow’s gloom. “Yes, sir,” he answered, eagerly. “I can’t learn a thing.”

“But these reports are not my affair. They are the Head’s.”

Sparrow’s face fell. “The Head told me to bring them to you, sir. He said he was too busy. And would you deal with me?”

“Very well. And now I am forced to remind you that our trial balance to-day was not quite encouraging. Come, what’s the matter?”

Sparrow regarded him thoughtfully, weighing his answer. "Sir," he said at last, "I told you this morning. The food disagrees with me. I am wasting away. My brain is getting no nourishment. I ought to go home. Moreover, sir, my only chance of learning is with a private tutor. A class distracts me."

"What a pity!" said Mr. Eggett, dryly. "Well, a *précis* is nourishing for the brain. So by to-morrow night you will write me a *précis* on the first chapter of any book that you like. You know what a *précis* is?"

Sparrow's reply was a wince. Had not Mr. Eggett recently set the fashion of substituting *précis*-writing for the old-fashioned impot, and did not he, Sparrow, number among Castlegate's miseries the writing of *précis* as last but a long way from least? "Yes, sir," he murmured, and went very softly out.

With an odd little smile Mr. Eggett watched him depart, then, opening a cupboard, he stood confronting thoughtfully a double rank of empty medicine bottles, posted, so to speak, in that witness-box in mute and melancholy evidence to the state of war between his digestion and himself, and to the hope that sprang eternal in his breast. True, for a space lawn tennis had ousted physic, and true that lawn tennis had been found equally wanting; but Mr. Eggett hoped on, hoped ever, trustful that one day he would discover the weapon

wherewith to turn his arch enemy out of his trenches. And now for the *n*th time he believed he had found it at last in that widely advertised specific "Digesto," which, if you took the word of Digesto, Ltd., banished indigestion well nigh at a glance. There stood the new arrival among the deposed, rearing its proud head in a wrapping of amber and gold, which on removal revealed a pamphlet of testimonials wound round it in the fashion of swaddling clothes. Each testimonial told of some sufferer cured, and Mr. Eggett felt his pulses quickening as he uncorked the bottle and helped himself liberally. Then he sat down to read through every one of the testimonials; in which congenial pursuit it would never have occurred to him that Sparrow that instant was likening him to a frying-pan.

Yet so it was. For on leaving his room Sparrow had stepped straight into the arms of Willett, who immediately launched overtures for a loan. And as Willett regarded Sparrow as a species of milch cow, and his overtures were always peremptorily framed, the hapless Sparrow was not inapt in observing that he had stepped out of the frying-pan into the fire. To which Willett, whose hair was as red as his wits were blunt, replied that he'd punch Sparrow's head if he called him a fire, but that he'd rather borrow half a crown, to be repaid next Saturday faithfully.

"But you've said that before," sighed Sparrow.

"You're a liar," said Willett.

"I mean you've promised to pay me back before, and you haven't done. You owe me four-and-ninepence already."

"Then that will make seven-and-three," said Willett readily. "And look here, Sparrow, if you're nervous about getting it back, I'll give you a debenture for it. There!" And Willett looked very sage, and rubbed his large hands.

Here was first fruit indeed of learning imbibed by the Germs! In his zeal for mastering all the methods of borrowing, Willett had discovered one royal road, namely, that when you wanted money badly you issued a debenture—and there you were!

"You remember," he said to Sparrow, "how the Old Egg two weeks ago was explaining debentures issued at a premium or par?"

"No, I don't," answered Sparrow.

"Well, he was. A debenture is a security; a thing you sort of pawn till you pay back."

"But *you're* to do the paying back," Sparrow sighed.

"Exactly. And I'll issue you a debenture. Now, look here. You've just come away from Eggett. I bet you he gave you a *précis* to do for him."

"He did," groaned Sparrow.

"Well, my brother's at Cambridge, you know, swotting for the Home Civil; and one of the

subjects for the Home Civil is *précis* writing. So he wrote one the other day for his coach, who was so bucked with it that he cracked it up tremendously, which made my brother so bucked that he sent it home to the governor, who sent it to me——”

“I see,” said Sparrow. “Like the house that Jack built.”

“I don’t know what you mean, you funny ass. But writing English has always run in our family, so the governor sent it to me to study as a model. And what I mean, old man, is this: you lend me half a crown, and I’ll issue my brother’s *précis* to you as a debenture. It’s yours till I pay you back. That’s what I mean.”

The financier ended largely and benignantly with the air of one who enriches his friend for life.

Like pious Æneas or one of his accomplices, Sparrow paused, revolving many things in his mind. No sooner had the sentence of *précis* been passed than he had decided to send up a three-line effort which should incense Mr. Eggett to the extreme, and lead, who knows, to the sequel he sought so devoutly. But here was a choicer scheme, to paralyse Eggett by showing up a *précis* sparkling with brilliance. And, reflecting that such coruscations were certain if the Willett at Cambridge were only half as good at writing as his brother at Castlegate was at borrowing

money, he inquired what the précis was all about.

"As if I knew!" exclaimed Willett. "I haven't looked at it."

But he was away and back in a flash with the masterpiece, which turned out to be a condensation of Chapter I of *Graft's Manual of Psychology*, and as Sparrow had been given a free hand, and had no idea at all what psychology was, a better subject could not have presented itself, and the bargain now assumed a more serious aspect.

"But, Willett," he said, "you owe me four-and-nine. Here's two bob and six ha'penny stamps. That makes seven bob."

Willett thrust the manuscript into his hands, and bolted hot-foot before he could change his mind.

II

Sparrow came near to enjoying his dinner on Saturday. For the nonce his features had lost their forlorn cast as he munched the stringy meat with a placid indifference, and chewed the cud of tingling anticipation of the surprise he was about to spring upon Mr. Eggett. Watching that good man at his place at the high-table, sipping a glass of warm water with one eye on the clock, Sparrow knew that he was grudging every minute until he could thrust back his chair as the signal for rising. For as the Head dined with his wife and family, Mr. Eggett presided over the School at dinner.

Mr. Eggett was fidgeting to get off to tennis

(perhaps to secure the one court before Mr. Fleetwood), and it was Sparrow's amiable design to thwart him by presenting both himself and his purchase before his taskmaster could start to change. So the latter was barely back in his room ere Sparrow was there also, clothed in an engaging simplicity, and begging attention for the *précis* he had brought.

"You told me to bring it to you to-day, sir," he lisped.

"I said this evening, Sparrow. I said this evening, distinctly."

"But I knew you'd be glad if I could get it done before, sir."

"Fudge!" snapped Mr. Eggett.

"And I thought you'd like to see it directly it was done."

Through the window, flung open wide to the sunshine, stole the first happy note of bat upon ball. The masters' tennis court lay further afield, yet not so far but the net could be glimpsed through the trees.

"Well," murmured Mr. Eggett, turning to the window. "Leave it on the table, Sparrow. I'll glance at it presently."

His unwelcome guest's face assumed the profoundest disappointment. Without budging an inch he dropped a dejected exclamation.

"But what?" rapped Mr. Eggett, wheeling round.

"It has cost me so much, sir."

"Cost you so much?"

"So much trouble, sir, and so much time; and I'm very anxious to hear what you think of it, sir."

"But you did not suppose I should read it now?"

"Yes, sir, I did, sir. Knowing how fond you are of *précises*."

"The plural of *précis* isn't *précises*, Sparrow. And I've got to change."

"Sir, it won't take five minutes."

As Sparrow pleaded, he detected from the corner of his eye two figures in flannels stepping on to the court, and possibly Mr. Eggett detected them, too. For a sigh escaped him, and a shrug of despair.

"You are a most inopportune person," he murmured. "Can't you understand that I'm off to tennis?"

"But Mr. Baines and Mr. Fleetwood have just got the court, sir. And their singles always last ages and ages. I know, because I've fagged the balls for them."

"You must fag for me one day," said Mr. Eggett pleasantly, but as he spoke he snatched up the bone of contention—if Willett *frère's* masterpiece may be thus designated—and while Sparrow was explaining that fagging tennis balls was bad for his heart, Mr. Eggett carelessly

smoothed out the foolscap sheets. Then at once his face grew stern and his mouth hardened. Successful surprises should be not only immediate, but patent ; and the surprise which Sparrow had sprung responded to both these tests.

He had indeed struck a new line. Never in the course of Mr. Eggett's long experience at Castle-gate had any boy ventured to show up a typewritten imposition. But here was this *précis* fresh from the throbbing brain of Willett, of Caius, dressed by Sparrow's industrious fingers in a new garb, precisely typed with a neat and beautiful margin. Mr. Eggett, be it repeated, had never known anything so audacious in his career.

He closed the window with a vicious click, and made as if to tear the *précis* into shreds ; but, second thoughts prevailing, he tossed it into a drawer, and, taking the offender by the lapels of his coat, demanded icily how he had dared to do it ? Sparrow replied, in the tone of one sorely hurt, that typewriting was so much easier to read than his writing.

" Did you have it typed in the town ? No, you have not had time."

" Oh, no, sir. I typed it myself."

" You have a—what do you call it, eh ?—a machine, then ? "

" Yes, sir," said Sparrow. " A little one. I saved up for it."

Mr. Eggett smiled grimly. " Oh, you did," he

remarked. "On purpose, I opine, to play tricks like this?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Sparrow, in a faint, tired tone. "I'm in a decline, sir, and I got it to make my will on."

"I see," murmured Mr. Eggett, not rising to the bait; and paused, and threw the window wide again, admitting each happy sound from the outer world. "Well, Sparrow, you were very anxious to come up after dinner. Now you are here you shall stay. Go and fetch your machine."

"My bicycle," said Sparrow at once. "Very good, sir."

"Don't say 'Very good, sir,'—you're not a butler. And not your bicycle, of course. Your commercial apparatus. We will find you something to do. Go and fetch it immediately."

"Very good—I mean, very bad; yes, sir," said Sparrow. "But my *précis*, sir?" He hesitated.

"On psy—psychology, sir."

"We will read that another day," was the cold rejoinder.

When Sparrow returned the sitting-room was empty, but a voice from the adjoining bedroom commanded him to clear a space on the table for his typewriter. So he pushed aside an amber-and-gold medicine bottle and a pamphlet which appeared to deal with the bottle's contents, and settled his machine and himself apathetically till Mr. Eggett reappeared, racket in hand.

"Sparrow," said Mr. Eggett, almost lightly, for his anger had evaporated while he changed, "you will remain here and type me another précis till call-over. Now, what subject shall we choose? For you have not much brains, so we must——"

"Sir, I've done one on psy—psychology!" Sparrow put in.

But Mr. Eggett had not been born yesterday. Perfectly aware from the glimpse he had taken that Sparrow's typewritten impertinence had dealt with a subject of which he had no knowledge whatsoever, he was not to be drawn into any immediate attempt to probe the source of Sparrow's inspiration, or the depths of his ignorance. That discussion was shelved till more opportune moments.

"Well, Sparrow," he said, "what shall we choose? You're so brainless."

Breathlessly Sparrow converted this opportunity. "Yes," he rejoined in a gust, "this school's bad for my brains, sir, and the air doesn't agree with my constitution, or the food, sir; that's why I'm going into a decline, and——"

"We know all about that," Mr. Eggett snapped, his glance playing over the table till it halted at the Digesto testimonials. Then he smiled oddly. "The food disagrees with you, Sparrow? Well, my digestion, as you know, is not of the best."

Sparrow responded with a fair imitation of astonishment.

"Now, you see this pamphlet, Sparrow? It contains copies of letters, very grateful and encouraging letters, I may say, from people this medicine has cured. Perhaps the Castlegate food will agree with you better when you have summarized for me these grateful testimonials. In any event, you shall try, Sparrow; you shall try."

"You mean, sir, you want me to make a précis of these letters?"

"Your brain is improving already. Yes, I do, Sparrow. You will make the best job you can of it, type your result, and show it to me when I ask you for it."

"Not before, sir?" lisped Sparrow.

"Not before," came the reply, with swift emphasis. "And certainly not on Wednesday after dinner." Whereupon Mr. Eggett went briskly, swinging his racket.

Sparrow's first procedure when he found himself alone was to uncork the bottle and help himself to a generous sample of Digesto. Next, his lips pursed wryly, he bolted into the bedroom, and rinsed his mouth out with a glass of water, returning for an inquisitive tour round the room, and ending at the window, where he focused the tennis court till his intent watch was rewarded by the spectacle of a familiar ungainly figure removing its blazer and proceeding to serve double faults. Considerably refreshed, Sparrow backed to the table and began his task of reading

the testimonials. He read them twice through solemnly with puckering brow, and afterwards dropped his head in his hands and thought. For ten good minutes he thought ere slipping out of the room, to be back again in a moment, when his typewriter got busy.

He shut the window, for the noises outside distracted him. *Click-click-click!* the keys of his machine rattled, and Mr. Eggett's chagrin at losing three love games must have been lightened could he have seen his industrious captive. Never did he raise his head from its task until two sheets had been done and destroyed, and the third attempt was in smooth water. Then did Sparrow smile wanly, and stretch himself.

Five minutes before call-over he had finished his task, and departed.

III

Into his class of Germs on Friday morning strode Mr. Eggett with an extraordinary feeling of well-being. Digesto at last must have been putting in its good work, or maybe his mental exhilaration was otherwise due to the fact that his book on "Surds" was published this morning. Mr. Eggett had written on many mathematical subjects—where is the scholar who does not know *Eggett on Roots?*—but he could recall no labour more truly enjoyable than that which he had devoted to *Eggett on Surds*. To-day, then, this

work, and the first notices of it, would appear. Glowing with that healthy anticipation with which every author regards the reviewers' notices, Mr. Eggett took his place with his business disciples.

Doubtless the London papers reach Castlegate normally, but they are not brought up to the School till eleven o'clock, and accordingly Mr. Eggett must curb his impatience for the opinions expressed on his work by the critics. In the meantime he was radiating a steady cheerfulness, and when Willett, having fixed him with basilisk eye, inquired what happened to a debenture that was not redeemed, he traced that instrument's career from cradle to coffin before reverting to the point where they had left off last week. "We were discussing, you will remember, a trial balance, and showed how it is the bedrock of all true accounts."

Sparrow, upon whom his glance fell as he spoke, created considerable surprise by the briskest "Just so, sir."

"Yes, precisely," smiled Mr. Eggett. "Precisely, Sparrow. This morning we pass on to profit and loss—what is that, Willett?" For Willett's arm and red hand had shot up.

"Supposing, sir, you borrow money on a debenture, and you never pay it back. Is that a profit?"

Mr. Eggett smiled more gaily. "Well, it might be," he said. "It might be a profit to the person who had lent you the money."

"But suppose, sir, you didn't want your debenture back?"

Mr. Eggett looked puzzled. "If you," he demurred, "borrowed money (which, of course, you never do, Willett, I'm sure) and issued, as we term it, a debenture, you would pay interest on the loan until paid off, or forfeit the property secured by debenture. If that is what you mean——"

"But suppose that it's not Willett's property originally, sir? And suppose that, anyhow, it's not worth what he borrowed?" This from Sparrow, most astonishingly again evincing a hot and unwonted interest in the subject, that drew every eye in amazement to him.

"Ah, well," said Mr. Eggett, after a pause, "if you borrowed money on other folk's belongings——"

"But if they are your brother's?" put in Sparrow.

The game was getting too warm, which Willett notified by a hack of caution on his creditor's shin. But Mr. Eggett, considerably out of his depth, spared further need for alarm by changing the subject.

"Sparrow, I'm glad to see that your brain is much better. It refreshes me to see you display an intelligent interest in the matters of a debenture or anything else." He drew a paper from his pocket and smoothed it out. "I have here," he

went on, beaming round the class, "a really remarkable effort from our friend Sparrow. It is a little précis which he wrote for me last week, and it deals quite brilliantly with a recondite subject."

Up shot Willett's arm, but Mr. Eggett dodged it, bent upon no more expositions of debentures.

"Sparrow selected psychology, and Mr. Graft's excellent manual; that is to say, the first chapter of that pleasant work. An extremely able chapter, as we all agree, and a more than able summary by our friend Sparrow. He was telling us last week that his brain was ill-nourished. Here we have very direct evidence to the contrary." Mr. Eggett had folded the belauded sheets, and now beckoned Sparrow up to receive them back. "There, keep it, Sparrow. I have much enjoyed its perusal. And now we shall know in the future what to expect from you. Your brilliance is restored. You can plead no more dulness."

Sparrow thrust the typescript into his desk with a sour glance at its author's brother, and a dim suspicion that the Old Egg was pulling his leg, and had not read a word of the masterpiece. He ventured on a test. "Do you think, sir," he asked, "that the beginning or the end is the better?"

"Both equally admirable, Sparrow," was the smooth reply. "Drinkwater, run and fetch me the newspapers from the Common Room. Our little work on Surds is published to-day, and we

shall find—er—some review notices.” And here the good man tried to look unconcerned and as if he were not burning with eagerness.

Off went Drinkwater like a torpedo from its tube, for nothing could have suited the Germs better than to search the papers for notices of “our” book instead of splitting the head over profit and loss. And when the emissary returned with an armful, every one saving Sparrow strained at the leash, urging to be allowed to conduct the search.

Perhaps with an eleventh-hour diffidence, Mr. Eggett did not retain a paper for himself, but leaned beaming over his desk, awaiting results, while nothing was heard for a while but the crisp rustling as eager fingers turned from sheet to sheet. Then Drinkwater nudged Carr and drew his attention to something at which they stared with startled eyes, and next the restless hand of Willett uprose. “I’ve found something, sir,” he was saying, with an odd little gulp.

His voice sounded very queer; very queer indeed. And he made no effort to rise and take up his discovery.

“And I’ve found something, too!” exclaimed Raitt, just as queerly.

“And so have I, sir!” came in a whisper from Merry.

“Well, read it out. You first, Raitt,” bade Mr. Eggett.

But nobody answered, and nobody made a move, so he stepped from his desk and took the first paper that offered, leisurely adjusting his glasses the while. In a silence that could be felt every Germ looked at Sparrow.

Mr. Eggett read on with lowering brow. What he read was not to be missed had you tried to miss it. It hit you in the face as you turned the sheet. Not a notice, this, of *Eggett on Surds*, but a photograph of Sparrow looking his forlornest, every doll-like feature exact; with a wide Eton collar; perhaps Sparrow as he appeared some two years ago. And beside and beneath this stupefying apparition a letterpress in blatant and shrieking type:—

BRAINS AND BRILLIANCE!

A Public School Master tells the story of his Most Promising Pupil.

RESTORED TO BRAINS AND BRILLIANCE

BY

DIGESTO.

Mr. Thomas Eggett, M.A., B.Sc., F.R.A.S., the popular Second Master of Castlegate, bears testimony to an astonishing cure worked by DIGESTO upon his most promising pupil, when all else had failed. But we record his own words. He has written as follows:—

“I am enclosing you a photograph of Thomas Whitcombe Shirley Sparrow, who was for some time the most promising pupil under my charge, with a generous disposition, and singu-

larly talented. He became, however, a martyr to indigestion, contracted, it is believed, by overwork. His brain power and his concentration abandoned him, and although every customary treatment was tried, all failed to restore him. In these straits, with serious evidence of a decline, it was decided to try him with your DIGESTO, and after the first dose his symptoms abated; he regained his interest in life and his zeal for his studies. He is now completely restored to brilliance and brains.

“That Thomas Whitcombe Shirley Sparrow is as sound as a bell again must be attributed entirely to your marvellous remedy, and for the benefit of similar sufferers I deem it proper to put his case upon evidence. You are at liberty to make what use you wish of this letter.—I am, gentlemen, yours gratefully,

THOMAS EGGETT, M.A., B.Sc., F.R.A.S.”

In Bottles 3s. 9d. and 4s. 6d.

Advt.] From all Druggists and Stores.

It synchronized so fatally and well. But a few minutes earlier Mr. Eggett had dilated upon the restored brilliance of Sparrow, and here, for all the world to see, was startling confirmation in black and white. Mr. Eggett crushed the paper between his palms, and, collecting the others, turned frigidly to affairs. Sorely the Germs were taxed till the hour of release struck.

“And now,” he was saying to Sparrow, very shortly afterwards, “whatever do you mean by such mad behaviour?”

“Well, sir,” lisped Sparrow, “how should *I* know they’d print it?”

"You did it last Saturday afternoon, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. It was my précis of the testimonials. There were bits précied from each of them. The bit about loss of concentration is from a letter——"

"That will do. The names you used were not in the testimonials."

"Well, sir. I couldn't think how to précis names."

Mr. Eggett stooped at his cupboard, and returned, drawing between his fingers the lithest of canes. "And do you appreciate, Sparrow, that you forged my name?"

"Only, sir, by putting it to the letter!"

"Which you typed, of course, on school paper? Well, hold out your hand!"

The six had been given solemnly and received, and Sparrow had reached the door when he was recalled.

"Of course, the Head can't miss your performance, Sparrow, and what view he will take I cannot say—I cannot say. He is sure to view it most gravely."

Then at last did Sparrow's sad countenance brighten. "Oh, sir, do you think——"

"That he will expel you? Oh, *no!*" And Mr. Eggett's expression was that of the chess-player who has just cried "Mate!" to a worthy opponent.

Chapter III

Sparrow Puts His Foot Down on Profiteering

“**I** CALL it nothing but rank profiteering,” sighed Sparrow.

He was leaning against the counter of the tuck-shop, and regarding with gloomy disfavour a small piece of stickjaw for which he had just paid out the sum of one penny. At his elbow was Willett, who had followed him in, but had not succeeded in extracting the small loan that would have brought his debt to seven shillings and sixpence.

“Extortionate!” Sparrow asserted, consuming the stickjaw. “It used to be only a ha’penny, and a much bigger chunk.”

Joe, who had served in the tuck-shop for so many years that no complaints could ruffle his equanimity, and whose square, homely features rarely expressed any feeling save an occasional concern for his customers’ insides, now committed himself to a frozen smile, and wagged his head from the other side of the counter.

“But, Mr. Sparrow,” he said, “you know everything’s up. Food is up. Sugar’s up. Sweets are up. The cost of living——”

“This isn’t the debating society,” Sparrow broke in. “I don’t want to argue the point. You’re profiteering.”

"Then you shouldn't complain to me," Joe answered testily.

"Why not?"

"Because, as you know, I'm not responsible for the prices. I'm here to serve and see you pay on the nail. The shop's run by the Games Committee for the benefit of the Games Fund, and if you want to grouse, sir, you grouse to *them*."

"And a fat lot of good," Willett chipped in, "that would be!"

"Well, complain to the Fund's treasurer. He does the buying."

Into Sparrow's melancholy eyes flashed a gleam of animation, and he turned to Willett.

"Isn't Eggett the treasurer?" he said.

Willett nodded. "But he'll only set you a *précis*. You'd much better chuck it, old man, and lend a chap threepence."

Sparrow consumed the last fragment of his delicacy and purchased a sausage-roll, which he handed to his friend. Then, having borrowed Joe's duster to wipe his hands, he emitted a deep sigh and went moodily forth, leaving the hopeful Willett to lie in wait for the next philanthropist who might stroll in.

It was immediately after third lesson next morning that Mr. Eggett, returning to fling off his gown, with a springiness of step and lightness of bearing that indicated no remnants of indigestion, found upon his table a neatly-typed envelope

addressed to him as honorary treasurer of the Games Fund. He opened it, and as he read its contents bewilderment gave way to a broad smile. There must have lurked some rare virtue in Digesto, for our sufferer had never felt better in his life, and his pangs now lay behind him but as a nightmare. He was, then, in a mood that was almost sparkling, anticipating with gusto his Christmas holidays. And certainly, as Sparrow appeared now at his summons, he greeted him with lively cordiality.

"Sparrow," he said, "this is a very good joke," and he indicated the letter in his hand.

"It may appear a joke to you, sir," sighed Sparrow; "but profiteering isn't any joke to the poor."

"You go beyond me, Sparrow. Do you seriously mean that you want to complain of the tuck-shop prices?"

"A penny for a measly bit of stickjaw!"

"But everything is dearer since the war."

"And you know, sir," Sparrow went on steadily, "that I can't enjoy the School food, sir. It doesn't nourish me, sir, and it leaves me very hungry. So I have to go to the shop, and there I'm rooked."

"Stickjaw will not nourish you, I'm afraid, Sparrow. But we're off the point. The prices are fair. So run away off and I'll tear up your letter, and as soon as we can cheapen things we will do so."

“When will that be?” said Sparrow lugubriously.

“Not this term, and probably not next term. By the way, are you settling down a bit better, Sparrow? You growing more at home at Castle-gate? No more idea of getting your father to remove you?”

But loth very likely to reveal any holiday projects for gentle persuasion which he might be cherishing, Sparrow did not rise to the lightly flung cast, replying merely with a look of intense dejection as Mr. Eggett gestured him to the door. He went as unconvinced as he had come; but the appeal to Cæsar having failed, where was his remedy?

“You have none,” Willett assured him. “You haven’t a sniff.”

II

A few days later, when passing Sparrow’s study, which the latter no longer shared with Hebbelthwaite, Mr. Eggett was surprised by sounds of merriment which battled their way out through the closed door, and spoke of extreme cheerfulness within. This was more odd, because, although it was Wednesday’s half, the rain had been falling all day in a hopeless flood calculated to depress the most buoyant spirit. And Sparrow’s spirit being anything but buoyant, and his sociability being conspicuous by its absence, Mr. Eggett mar-

velled greatly, and, halting an instant, was tempted to put his head in and find out what was happening. But second thoughts prevailed. He would leave them to themselves. Indeed, it was very, very good, he reflected, to be assured by such aural demonstration that young Sparrow, despite his protests to the contrary, had settled down and was making friends, and so forth. Thus cheered, the good man passed upon his way.

Having occasion to visit the tuck-shop on the following Wednesday to balance certain accounts with Joe, it being now only two days before breaking-up, Mr. Eggett was struck to find it practically vacant of small fry. "Trade falling off?" he smiled. "Well, where are the juniors?"

"It seems, sir," Joe said slowly, "we're profiteers."

"Oh, that!" laughed Mr. Eggett. "That was a joke, Joe."

"Then I reckon the kids have spent all their term's money, sir. For I've scarce seen a soul of them in the place these ten days."

"Queer," said the honorary treasurer, and, his business done, he took a blithe way back along the terrace. In three days now he would be hundreds of miles away from Surds and Germs, and the idiosyncrasies of Sparrow. His examination papers were all corrected and marked, his arch complaint had vanished for good and all; for once he could sit down to Christmas fare and

face it with a light heart. Metaphorically, Mr. Eggett trod on air.

Now, Sparrow's study, be it remembered, looked on to the terrace, and the window of Sparrow's study was slightly open. Ere Mr. Eggett had reached it his ears were assailed by a gust of such cheerful hubbub as that of last week. But to-day, with the window ajar, he would scarce have been human had he not paused to take one glance within. This glance *en passant* became a steady stare, which ended in a recoil of blank stupefaction.

Nobody had detected his face at the pane, but they could hardly miss the familiar form when it stood at the door two minutes later.

"Sparrow!" he was ejaculating. "What is all this?"

"All this" was a highly colourable imitation of a tuck-shop on a miniature scale. The table had been pushed against the wall, and sustained boxes of chocolate and nougat and a plate of three-corners. Sponge cakes raised comforting heads from a glass dish, and bottles of ginger-beer reposed on their sides. Nor was a Christmas cake with icing forgotten, and the seasonable mince-pie was present in force. Behind the table, and beneath a festoon of saveloys which hung, most invitingly scarlet, from a nail in the wall, Willett stood in his shirt-sleeves *à la* Joe, while Sparrow in front was clearly engaged in resisting too many customers simultaneously.

Mr. Eggett was very quick to detect that on every article the price was marked, but possibly he was more struck by the placard tacked behind the saveloys on the wall. Its black-ink characters on white cardboard informed him that he had stumbled upon—

SPARROW'S



ANTI-PROFITEERING TUCK-SHOP.

All Goods Sold at Lowest Prices.

SUPPORT SPARROW AND ELIMINATE
THE PROFITEER!

“Eliminate,” echoed Mr. Eggett, as he picked up a piece of stickjaw marked $\frac{1}{2}d.$ *only*. “Now, Sparrow, where did you get ‘eliminate’ from?” But this he probably asked only to gain time, while debating how to take this astonishing novelty.

The proprietor, whose efforts had made him thirsty, stood now with a bottle of ginger-beer to his lips, and, with head and shoulders well back, was gurgling pleasantly, when Mr. Eggett’s hand fell on his arm. Willett, arrested in the act of serving, gaped and extended a saveloy into space. And while two of the customers struggled to hide themselves behind the door, which their visitor had not shut, Benskin Minor, with some presence of mind, ducked beneath the table itself, and lay panting.

The bolder beings munched and stood their

ground, for, after all, it was only two days to the holidays, and so the Old Egg, they reflected, could not do much.

But Mr. Eggett's mind was now made up. There was no actual rule against any boy selling tuck, and he could treat this isolated instance as a good jest. For his spirits, remember, were high, and Christmas was coming. So, to their general relief, he first closed the door, and then inquired genially of Sparrow why he had not been invited to inspect his establishment.

"For, you know," he smiled, "I'm an expert on tuck-shops. And I should like—er—to compare your prices with mine."

"Yes, sir," said Sparrow at once, as Benskin emerged, very nearly upsetting all the good things in the process.

"And wherever did you get this fine spread from, Sparrow?" the inspector asked, when he had gone the round.

It was Willett's turn to intervene proudly. "My cousin, sir," he smirked. "He's a wholesale confectioner. And he gave us them cost price and threw in the cake, sir."

"Then no wonder you undersell me," smiled Mr. Eggett.

"But, sir, won't you try a slice of the cake!"

Then the miracle happened. For Mr. Eggett nodded blandly, and the amazed and gratified company were now to behold him partaking of

cake, demanding a mince-pie, winding up with a piece of nougat, and pronouncing all excellent.

"Very good! Very good indeed!" he reiterated. "I haven't enjoyed food like this since I was a lad. Now perhaps half a bottle of ginger-beer."

It is agreed that Mr. Eggett's popularity never reached such heights as it touched that afternoon. The querulous dyspeptic had made way for a merry comrade who radiated good-fellowship. They cheered him when he left at last, reluctantly; ere settling down to do their level best to support Sparrow in his fight against profiteering. But funds were short, and when Benskin suggested tick, the anti-profiteer proved hard as a flint. "No money, no grub," he persisted, in doleful terms. And this proving so, the last customer took himself off, with half a dozen saveloys unconsumed still, and two desolate mince-pies flanking one box of chocolates. Of the noble Christmas cake not one crumb remained.

Said Willett, reaching stealthily for a mince-pie, as he and the proprietor counted takings: "But, of course, old Eggett will stop us next term!"

The proprietor gripped his wrist. "No, you don't," he observed. "You've nicked any amount while you've been serving. You put that mince-pie back, Willett, my son." Sparrow, it will be noted, was growing aggressive, and felt no longer his former dread of his creditor.

"But you said I could have as much as I liked for serving."

"So long as the shop was open. It's shut now."

"Then if I borrow two and nine, old man, I'll owe you ten bob, which will make us square—I mean I'll give you a new debenture for the lot."

But Sparrow was too quick. He snatched the old boot which had done no ignoble service as a till, and pocketed all the contents with lightning rapidity. "No, Willett," he said, "a fair do is a fair do. I've got to pay your cousin. You're only assistant."

"Then I'll tap my cousin," said Willett, hopefully. "But, I say! Do you think we can carry on next term?"

"You may, Willett. I retire from business to-day. But, of course, old Eggett won't allow it any more. And if he winked at it, there's the Games Committee."

"Yes," said Willett, pensively, "there is. I don't fancy *them* coming in and sampling our grub."

III

At breakfast-time next morning one or two noticed that Mr. Eggett was not in his usual place. When Chapel had succeeded breakfast, it was told among the Germs, whose last flights into commerce would take place to-day, that their business mentor had not been seen in Chapel; and when presently they were gathered for their exertions to be con-

fronted by no less a personage than the Head himself, their gloomy apprehensions were realized, and scotched was the farewell rag they had joyously contemplated.

With a twinkle in his eyes, the Head surveyed them. "I am afraid," he said, "that I cannot lay any claim to the profound commercial knowledge of our friend, Mr. Eggett. But as he is unhappily indisposed, I shall have to put you through your paces instead. Stand up, somebody, and tell me what you have learned."

There was not a movement. Each eyed his neighbour appealingly. Nobody was anxious to expose the extent of his disqualifications for a business career. Then, to the general relief, a hand was raised and followed by the audacious figure of Willett, who, after a simper, remarked, with a certain persuasiveness:—

"If you please—sir, I know a good deal about debentures."

Sparrow scowled, but the situation was saved. For, admitting that he knew little about debentures, but graciously condescending to be informed, the Head suffered Willett to ramble upon his way, thus giving his fellow Germs the opportunity to read up their notes in case they were called upon.

But Sparrow's interest was languid, his thoughts astray. He was wondering what had happened to Mr. Eggett, and deciding to find out as soon as he could. So twelve o'clock saw him outside

the familiar door, upon which he tapped a little timidly, without response. He waited, knocked again, then entered softly.

The sight that met his eyes confirmed his fears. On a couch drawn up close to the fire Mr. Eggett was reclining in his dressing-gown. At his hand, on a round table, stood a basin of gruel, and beside it a portly bottle in amber and gold. The cork had been extracted, and the sufferer was in the act of raising a spoonful of the fluid to his lips when the apparition of Sparrow stood before him. Mr. Eggett gave two dismal groans, swallowed his Digesto, and stared at his visitor.

"If you please, sir, I've come to ask how you are, sir," said Sparrow.

"Ugh!" winced Mr. Eggett. "Tell me, Sparrow? Is Willett's cousin *really* a confectioner?"

"Yes, sir," said Sparrow. "Really. A wholesale confectioner."

"Then all I can say," said the sufferer, with a grimace, "is that he makes an abominable Christmas cake. Nothing could be worse—except his mince-pies."

"They've disagreed with you, sir?"

"Disagreed! I have never been so ill in my life."

"Perhaps it was the nougat, sir," ventured Sparrow.

"No, it was not the nougat," snapped Mr. Eggett, his lips contorting under the qualms he

suffered. "A man who makes a cake so atrocious, Sparrow, ought to be whipped through the town at the tail of a cart. Were they actual currants in the mince-pies?"

Sparrow regarded his victim dolefully. "Is there anything I could do, sir, to cheer you up?"

"Yes; take yourself out of my sight," gasped Mr. Eggett.

But scarcely had Sparrow gone than another visitor arrived to intrude upon the invalid's privacy. This was the Head, who, after a genial inquiry and a reference to the progress of the Germs, asked his second in command if he would be well enough to get away to-morrow, as arranged? Mr. Eggett—who was feeling just then that all he wanted on earth was to be left in peace, and who shuddered at the idea of a jolting train—replied with a groan that nothing was more unlikely; whereupon the Head, although doing his best to look concerned, unfolded the project which he had come to reveal.

"Well, Eggett, of course, I'm very sorry," he said; "and so will Mrs. Games be; very sorry, I'm sure. But as it happens, Eggett, if you could stay a couple of days it will relieve us of some inconvenience. We want to be off to-night till the twenty-fourth, so if you could be on the spot till Christmas Eve, to see the staff safely off, and so on and so forth, we shall be enormously obliged. And it cuts both ways, for it gives you the chance to get fit."

The sufferer raised a feeble head from its cushion. "But I'm far too unwell," he murmured, "to look after things."

"Oh, the very fact of your presence will be enough. Then that's arranged, then. Well, take care of yourself, Eggett. A merry Christmas, Eggett, and a happy New Year!" And away the Head bustled, congratulating himself on the adroitness with which he had converted the situation.

A merry Christmas! The martyr on the altar of Sparrow's shop reflected that the Head might have spared him that shaft at least! A merry Christmas—with his inside surrendered to Bolshevism, and the vista ahead of toast-and-water and slops! And chained till Christmas Eve to this torture-house—he groaned and made a wry face as the pangs took him—when to-morrow morning all the rest would be off and away! He visioned the eight and nine o'clock trains at Castle-gate, packed with his Germs and the rest, and the glad hissings of steam.

To the letter were his visions realized. No sooner were the dormitory doors opened than a horde of rioters, most of whom had been dressed and ready these two hours past, poured and scuffled and pressed from every dormitory and down the stone stairways to the hall (which they had thoughtfully strewn with torn paper the night before, so that it lay in some places ankle deep), where they swallowed cups of scalding coffee; and

so, heedless of further breakfast, away to the station. The engine-driver of the eight o'clock greeted their rush on the platform with a blast of his whistle. The patient train was invaded, doors slammed heartily, the guard waved his green flag like a man possessed—and Castlegate's first contingent had gone for its holidays.

Sparrow was not with them. He was in no great hurry. And certain musical jinglings from Willett's pocket led him to believe that this evasive young man was in funds. Wherefore he decided to see his friend off by the nine o'clock on the up platform. "We might wait, if you like," he said, "in the refreshment room."

"But," returned Willett, "I've had all the coffee and rolls I can stodge."

"Well, I could do with some tea. And it's your turn to stand."

"That's just about all I can pay for," said Willett, mendaciously.

Having settled Sparrow at a table with his back to the buffet, Willett approached the latter gingerly and, ordering the tea, proffered a ten-shilling note. Although he did this with stealth, the artifice lost effect when the lady in charge inquired in strident accents whether he had no smaller change. Sparrow, whose ears were sharp and eyes not inactive, turned upon the deceiver a gloomy regard, and demanded that accounts should be settled between them. Willett's rejoinder was to bolt from the room.

His creditor let him go with a shrug of disgust, and presently, when the nine o'clock drew out, Willett's head protruded from a rear coach, and, gesticulating in the friendliest fashion, shouted across the rails, "Next term, old man!"

Sparrow turned on his heel and left the station. He was in no hurry; no hurry at all.

IV

Perhaps realizing that it must make an effort for Christmas, Mr. Eggett's digestion pulled itself round surprisingly. When he woke on the 24th he felt a new being; at luncheon, with an incorrigible appetite, he was facing a stewed steak and mashed potatoes, and had just removed the most appetizing portion to his plate when Moffatt, the Head's butler, appeared beside him, and tendered on his salver a buff envelope.

"A telegram for Dr. Games, sir," he purred.

Mr. Eggett waved it away impatiently, "Can't you see," he snapped, "that it's not for me?"

"Dr. Games instructed that you were to deal with his wires, sir."

Mr. Eggett opened and read with a startled look. The message was indeed not a little alarming. Sparrow had left for home two days ago, yet here, unless his eyes deceived him, was the curt inquiry—

Where is my son?—Joseph Sparrow.

"Oh, but it's all a telegraphist's error," he said,

when he had stared at it for a full three minutes, and had bidden Moffatt ring the telegraph office up at once and instruct them to repeat the communication. But the savour of that steak had departed utterly, and, make as much pretence as he could of enjoying it, his harassed mind would dwell on the flimsy paper. Could anything have happened to young Sparrow? Perhaps Mr. Eggett owned in that first keen anxiety that the incorrigible rascal held a little corner in his heart.

Moffatt was back again in a few minutes. "There's no mistake, sir," he said. "The wire's quite correct."

"Well, then, we must act," Mr. Eggett rejoined, rising. "Go to the station, Moffatt, and make inquiries. In the meantime I'll decide what's best to be done. We won't reply to his father till you come back."

Moffatt had gone, and Mr. Eggett was fretting, striding before the School gates, all eyes for his return, when a taxi-cab, arriving at furious pace, deposited, not the butler whom he awaited, but a middle-aged stranger of agitated mien whose likeness to the fish-out-of-water at Castlegate proclaimed without need of a word his identity. He flung himself on Eggett with a cry. "What have you done with my boy?" he exclaimed. "Where is he?"

Eggett led him inside.

Mr. Sparrow whipped a letter out from his

ulster pocket, and thrust it into the other's nervous hands. "Just read that," he insisted. "It came this morning. We weren't anxious till this morning, as we thought he'd stayed on."

DEAR FATHER—

My cough is a little less hacking, but I may be late home, as my strength isn't equal, I think, to travelling by anything but easy stages. I hope I shall be strong enough to get home, but, as I've told you before, this school doesn't agree with me; the air isn't good, and my energies are all sapped. I think that I shall last over Christmas, with nursing, if I'm careful coming back to build up my strength. No more now, as writing tires my hand; I get so easily tired, as the food doesn't nourish. Did you get the stringy beef I sent you as a specimen?

Then Mr. Eggett laughed aloud in relief. "It's one of his pranks!" he said, and recounted briefly how strenuously Sparrow had struggled to get expelled. "Don't you be anxious, Mr. Sparrow, I beg you. We'll find the rogue, I am sure."

"The sooner the better!" was all the answer he got.

Together they went forth into the town, where they met Moffatt returning from the station. Yes, the lady in the buffet, reported Moffatt, recollected seeing a young gentleman answering the descrip-

tion quarrelling with another over a ten-shilling note. No, she did not know what train he had taken, or what had become of him ; she was too busy minding her own business. The station-master and his staff could add nothing further.

Then began a tiring search through the town. Inquiry was made at the post-office, and at shop after shop. Bethinking himself presently of Messrs. Brackell & Sons, Mr. Eggett found his old friend in the frock-coat, who, assisted by the pink-eyed Joe, was decorating his football jerseys with holly. " That young nipper what posed as my dummy ? " he answered. " No, I haven't seen him from that day to this. Lost him, have you ? Trust a bad penny to turn up ! "

They wearied now for tea, and to re-form their plans. While they took a cup in the pastry-cook's, it was suddenly borne in upon Mr. Eggett that his own train to town left at eight o'clock. But how could he go if the truant were undiscovered ? The idea was quite impossible.

Mr. Eggett pursed his lips acidly, and well for Sparrow that he was not at hand that moment. Sparrow Senior was frankly and weakly despondent, and began to ask how rivers and ponds were dragged. They paid their bill and departed, one advocating the police, and the other (Mr. Eggett) urging patience.

" You see," he explained, wearily, " *I* know him."

“ And don’t I know him as well ! ” puffed Sparrow *le père*.

“ Perhaps not so well as I do. In some aspects.”

“ You’re sure his letter is nonsense ? ”

“ The most absolute rubbish.”

“ But where would he go by short stages ? And feed himself up ? ”

“ We’ll feed him up,” was the sour reply, “ when we’ve got him.”

Mr. Sparrow retorted by reminding his companion of an axiom relative to catching your hare before cooking him ; and so, their tempers fraying as each sought to conceal his anxiety, they pursued their quest for two more hours. It was half-past six before Mr. Sparrow avowed that before he went a step farther he must eat something. “ We’ll take a chop,” said he, “ at this hotel ; and directly after that we’ll rouse the police.”

They were standing before the “ White Hart,” that roomy old inn which flings two pleasant bow windows over the pavement. Mr. Sparrow led the way to the coffee-room, where presently a flurried waiter presented himself, in one hand balancing a tray of viands, in the other grasping a napkin and sauceboat. Mr. Sparrow inhaled the aroma gratefully. “ Ah, roast duck,” he observed, “ and apple-sauce. Well, my man, that will do for us, as it’s ready.”

The waiter drew a pace back. “ Excuse me, sir, but this is for a customer upstairs. When

I've taken it up I can get you a chop or a steak, sir. The hot joints won't be ready till half-past seven."

"But that duck——"

"Ordered two hours ago, sir." He popped his head out. "Yes, coming at once!" he cried, as an imperious voice from the stairs' head demanded what had happened to its dinner. "The gentleman's got a train to catch," he explained. "Yes, coming! Coming!" And up the staircase he bolted.

But Mr. Eggett was staring at Mr. Sparrow, and Mr. Sparrow was gaping at Mr. Eggett. Either they knew that voice that called for its dinner or they were Dutchmen of the doublest Dutch. Three stairs at a time they bounded after the waiter, and at his coat-tails into a private room, where, seated at a table before the fire, they saw at last the object of their search.

Upon his face no melancholy brooded. In the happy warmth of the burning logs he sat and whetted his knife with a pleasant grin. A mighty bottle of cider kept him in company. Beyond dispute, Sparrow was about to do himself royally.

In the explanations which took the place of *his* dinner, it transpired that during his two days at the "White Hart" the truant had managed to feed himself up very well. "You see," he observed wistfully (the while his two discoverers were enjoying his duck), "after the long term and the School food I simply had to get my strength back

here. I was coming home by the half-past seven to-night."

Mr. Sparrow passed his plate for more apple-sauce. "And the cost of it all?" he gasped. "What about the bill?"

Sparrow smiled a chastened and subdued smile. "I've been taking lessons in business, father," he said, "and I've done a little trading for myself. I opened a tuck-shop"—his glance passed to Mr. Eggett—"and I've paid my way here from the profits."

"Then I call it," his father snapped, "rank profiteering!"

As Mr. Eggett saw the pair off that evening (with just time to bustle for his bag and his own train), Sparrow's father drew him to one side.

"Eggett," he implored, "next term you will deal with him faithfully?"

And Mr. Eggett answered grimly, "I *will*."

Chapter IV

The Great-Aunt at Hollowfoot

"A PLEASANT holiday, Eggett?" inquired the Head genially. "Feeling absolutely your own man again, what?"

Mr. Eggett raised a wary eye. He feared the Greeks, and especially when they brought gifts. With just such an engaging, casual air had the Head, commiserating with his digestive mishap

in December, suggested that he should stay at the school till Christmas Eve, to release Mrs. Games and himself for a day or two's jaunt. Therefore did Mr. Eggett respond cautiously, summoning all his wits to stand on guard.

"Fairly pleasant," he said, without animation.

"But you're looking fit. You've got quite a complexion!"

And certainly the sallow hue which indigestion had painted on its victim's cheeks had been banished by a tinge of red that deepened at the Head's allusion to it. Was Mr. Eggett blushing at his time of life?

"So at last you've found the real cure. What is it, Eggett?"

Mr. Eggett looked uncomfortable and guilty. Then he said stiffly, "Yes, I think I have." He indicated with his lean forefinger a golf-bag, filled with clubs, that leaned in the corner.

The Head's reply was first an incredulous stare. "What, golf?" he sneered contemptuously. "Golf?"

It had been an article of faith with the Head and his second master that golf was an old man's game, an imbecile thing, a silly waste of time with a silly ball. Indeed, when some junior members of the staff had asked permission a term or two before to lay out nine holes on the broken ground by the playing fields, he had snubbed them severely, and brusquely refused, asserting that so long as

he reigned at Castlegate none of his boys should footle about with a golf club. Boys, he had pronounced, should play cricket, and football, and tennis, yes, and fives. But golf! No, not if he knew it! And Mr. Eggett had seconded his scorn, applauding his decision, and testily adding that boys—and junior masters if they *would* have it—could take up golf when they were grandfathers.

So golf had been taboo at Castlegate, and the masters who wanted to play must play at the Dyke Club. And always Mr. Eggett had sourly chipped them, and when they got on golf “shop” in the Common Room, would either shake his lean shoulders and stroll away, or regard them very much with the tolerant air that a kindly keeper of lunatics bestows on his patients.

So that we can hardly feel astonished if now he looked uncomfortable and guilty. Nor that the Head repeated incredulously, “Golf!”

But though the deserter had hauled down his flag and left his chief to fight the good ship alone, he had some cause to show and reason to urge.

“My doctor,” he observed, “recommended me——”

“Walking exercise is just as good. You can go for long walks in the country without patting a ball.”

“But that,” said Mr. Eggett, “is what I can’t do. A long walk bores me.”

“Rubbish, man!” came the retort.

“Whereas when you are playing golf you don’t

notice how far you are walking, and you don't tire." Mr. Eggett was holding his own serenely. "And I assure you it has done me a power of good. My liver——"

"Rubbish!" the Head repeated.

"It has made me a new man. I had lessons all the holidays. Two rounds a day. Mr. Games, it's a splendid sport. I was hopeful that you would try it. You really should."

"I try it!" the Head exclaimed. "Why, Eggett, you and I have always agreed——"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Eggett put in, "but I didn't know then."

"So you don't regard it merely as a medicine?"

"A medicine! A cure!" Mr. Eggett's voice dropped. "Golf," he said devoutly, "is a science. It's more exact than mathematics and twice as ennobling."

"Well, you've got it badly enough at any rate. I suppose you'll be saying next that it's a game for the boys?"

The Head dropped this in the tone of a man who anticipates a prompt and emphatic denial. Judge, then, his amazement when Mr. Eggett first hesitated, and next in firm tones answered:—

"No game could be better!"

"What?"

"It teaches them concentration and self-reliance. It must bring out their manliness." The Head was staring aghast as Eggett continued. "And

I daresay, Mr. Games, that you observed that last year a Boys' Amateur Championship was held for the first time. So it seems I'm not alone in my opinion. And I must conclude that you and I have been wrong. Try golf for yourself. Shall I put you up?"

"Put me up?" the Head snapped. "Put me up *where*?"

"For the Castle Dyke Club," said Mr. Eggett remorselessly. "I joined the first day of term. I play on half-holidays."

Without a word the Head turned on his heel, leaving golf's latest disciple to his reflections. And very happy reflections they were in truth. For one thing, he had been given the opportunity to break the news of his apostasy. For another, he had every reason to believe that the card of 94 gross which he had returned last Saturday, would bring his handicap at the Dyke down to 16. And, lastly, he was tingling with good health. Not a medicine bottle now nor pill in his cupboard, and never a meal which he could not face like a man.

It is not to be supposed that in six short weeks Mr. Eggett had succeeded in mastering the game. Though rarely had novice brought to it grimmer resolve. He practised his swing in his bedroom early and late, on a mat with diagrams for placing the feet. And he knew every rule.

Possibly not a player in the land knew the rules of golf as well as did Mr. Eggett. His mathe-

matical mind had simply gobbled them up as thoroughly as it had assimilated Surds. Already he was recognized at the Dyke Club as an authority on rules and rulings. "Ask Eggett," they would remark when an argument arose.

A faint tap on the door broke his pleasant musings. Faint as it was, it had something distinctive about it. Mr. Eggett could have told you without looking up that it would be followed by the appearance of Sparrow.

"Oh, come in!" he groaned.

Sparrow came coyly. Despite his remarkable success as a profiteer and his feeding-up diversion on the way home for Christmas, this term Sparrow looked not the least bit brighter or happier, nor had he, apparently, shown any zest in existence. Although they had been back for four full weeks, during which he had repulsed all Willett's attacks on his purse, his bearing and demeanour maintained the gloom with which he had first entreated to be expelled. As he slipped in now, dragging one foot behind the other, he presented a perfect spectacle of dejection.

"Sir," he sighed, "to-morrow is Wednesday."

Mr. Eggett's glance was fixed on him searchingly.

"Yes, so I understand, Sparrow," he said.

"Sir, if I had an *exeat* after third lesson I could get to Hollowfoot Bridge by half-past one."

Hollowfoot Bridge, as all who know Castlegate know, is the junction for the main line to the West,

but why Sparrow should come out with the abrupt intelligence that, assuming certain conditions, he could reach there by half-past one (or half-past any other hour for that!) passed Mr. Eggett's comprehension entirely. The good man wondered if he had heard aright, or if his ears were suddenly playing him tricks.

"Eh? What?" he stammered.

"Sir, if I had an *exeat* after third lesson I could get to Hollowfoot Bridge by half-past one."

"Yes," was the dry retort. "And so could I."

Squaring his sparse shoulders and fingering his beard, Mr. Eggett rose as though to indicate that that was all there was to be said about it, and Sparrow's face lightened. Perhaps he found a secret and keen enjoyment in his tussles, verbal and otherwise, with the Old Egg.

So Mr. Eggett, fingering his beard, feigned abstraction, and waited for what should come next. He was quite aware that Sparrow would not budge until he had got his way or a flat refusal. And Sparrow stood stock-still and eyed him pensively.

A minute's silence followed, which Sparrow broke.

"If you please, sir, may I have my *exeat*?"

"And why Hollowfoot Bridge?"

"Sir, I have a great-aunt who lives there."

"At the bridge?"

"No; a mile or so down the line, sir."

"How very interesting!" said Mr. Eggett.

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"Yes, sir," purred Sparrow.

"You are not thinking, then, of opening a sweet-shop at Hollowfoot? As a shopman you were quite a success, Sparrow, though I shall never believe that Willett's cousin is a confectioner, for no real confectioner could have perpetrated that cake." Here Mr. Eggett groaned at its recollection. "And, Sparrow, if you try to repeat the venture, the Games Committee——"

"Sir," Sparrow interjected, "I've retired from business."

"Except in our commercial class. Very well. And if you get your *exeat* after third lesson, may I ask what time you will honour us by returning?"

"Would six o'clock be too late, sir?" said Sparrow at once.

Mr. Eggett dropped back into his chair. "Are you settling down, Sparrow?" he asked.

"Sir, I shall never be well till I leave Castlegate. It's no use my pretending that School life agrees with me. I'm not cut out for it, sir. I would rather be at home."

"I see, I see. Well, you can have your *exeat*."

"Thank you, sir," said Sparrow, and went demurely.

II

Pushing his chair back after dinner next day, Mr. Eggett's eyes rested on Sparrow's vacant place, and a picture presented itself of Hollowfoot,

and of Sparrow hastening to his great-aunt near the bridge. He felt glad that the lad was enjoying his afternoon, for he himself proposed to enjoy his own thoroughly. So off he hurried to his room to fetch his clubs and so away hot-foot to the Castle Dyke links.

The good man felt at peace with all the world. Even his Germs could be reviewed with benevolence. For the day was bright and crisp, the air sparkled, and it was immense to be striding away to the game of games. To-day he would make no fozzles, would top no drives, pull no simple approach shots into the bunker. And to-day he would keep his head still when he putted, and not be afraid to go for the back of the hole.

So, charged with optimism and kindliness, Mr. Eggett shouldered his canvas bag and went forth.

Few links are more pleasantly situated than those of Castle Dyke. The Club House, formerly a mansion much favoured by George the Third, faces long, cool gardens and a small lake, and is jealously sheltered by oak and elm. Behind the house stretch the links, some three miles and a half of turf that springs to the tread, of uphill and downhill, where cunning bunkers lurk and a stream roams.

Up the broad drive which sweeps to the front of the Club came Mr. Eggett, impatient to get to work. But in the act of easing his shoulder of his bag he was met by a cheerful being of rubicund

face, who greeted him with a quick inquiry which elicited a startled shake of the head.

"You did not?" exclaimed the rubicund being.
"That's strange!"

"Very strange," Mr. Eggett agreed coldly.
"But certainly I did *not* receive your notice."

The secretary of the golf club ceased to smile.
"Well, I'm very sorry, Eggett; very sorry," he said.
"I posted a notice last night to every member, and if yours has miscarried it isn't my fault. You see, the arrangement was only come to at the last minute, or I'd have given you earlier warning. I'm sorry, old man."

"But you have not told me why there's no play to-day."

"It's on the notice. We've lent the course for the afternoon for the qualifying round of the boys' championship."

"You have *what*?" snapped Mr. Eggett, testily.

Mr. Simpson led him to a basket chair in the hall. "Sit down," he bade. "Have a drink? No? Well, it's this way. This year the Boys' Open Championship is a bit early, and the preliminary qualifying rounds must be played off by Easter. They'll be played off by counties. Well, we've almost two hundred entries in our little lot, and a chunk of them are playing off here to-day."

"Swarms of miserable urchins on our course!"

"Eighteen holes, medal play. And the first five qualify. Do you take me?"

“Take you!” exchoed Mr. Eggett hotly. “I understand that I’ve had my journey for nothing. You should have sent me a wire. It is most disgusting.”

“Well, do you care to stroll round and have a look at them?”

“No,” barked Mr. Eggett. “Emphatically no! I see enough of boys every day of my life without wanting to watch them like locusts all over my links. I’ve had my journey for nothing. I shall go back.”

It was at this instant that a man rushed in breathlessly. “Simpson,” he jerked, “I’ve just had a telegram. Sorry I’ll have to leave you in the cart.”

The secretary had sprung to his feet. “What’s gone wrong?”

“An upset at the office. No further particulars. But I must get off at once. Ta-ta! Here’s the car!”

And, as he spoke, a car swept round the drive, and he had sprung in and was off, waving his hand before Mr. Simpson could move a step to detain him.

“Glynes,” he said suavely to Eggett, “always *was* an ass. But he’s put me in a hole, buzzing off like that.” He paused and favoured Eggett with a long scrutiny. “Look here, old man. You won’t have your journey for nothing. You must take Glynes’ place, and referee.”

Mr. Eggett shook his head. He still felt unappeased.

"Oh, but you must. You know the rules better than any of us. Now help me out, old man. Act as referee. That's what Glynes came over to do—and he's gone!"

"And I," growled Mr. Eggett, "am off, too."

He had risen, but the other detained him. For, like all good secretaries of all good Golf Clubs, Mr. Simpson was a diplomat also. He had aimed at mollifying Eggett's disappointment, and with the latter's next words saw his object achieved.

"Well, what," Mr. Eggett was saying, "does the referee do?"

"He stands by, Eggett. He stands by in case he is wanted. You see, all the couples have caddies, who know the rules and the local rules, but if a dispute should arise, then they send for the referee. Glynes has been wanted only once so far. If they want him again, then out you go."

"Well, then, shall we—er—stroll to the first tee?"

"Good man! I knew you'd agree. I'm most obliged." And arm-in-arm they passed round the Club house together.

III

They arrived just as the last pair were driving off—a sturdy youth from the local Grammar School and a very fat young person in plaid knickerbockers. Beside the tee were gathered a few onlookers, friends or relatives, who strode off after the players, whose caddies exchanged sociable

grins of defiance as they shouldered the bags and followed their men. Plaid knickerbockers had sliced over cover-point's head (or where cover would have stood had the club been a bat). And Mr. Eggett could sympathize with his disgust.

"That," he explained to the secretary, "is where I get so often."

He had brought an iron out with him, perhaps as symbol of office, and was proceeding to ask advice on the half-shot, when across the links a caddie appeared panting.

"Referee's wanted," he shouted, "on the fourteenth."

Off strode Mr. Eggett, not unimportant, following the caddie bustling back, and as he approached the fairway of the fourteenth he discerned two figures—one of them standing stiffly, and the other seated on the turf, hugging its knees. This figure had its back to Mr. Eggett. But as he arrived it scrambled to its feet, and, turning, revealed the doll-like features of Sparrow.

If Sparrow was dumbfounded, Mr. Eggett was stupefied. Sparrow, when he had sent for the referee, had little dreamed that he would materialize thus! And Mr. Eggett, hasting to the summons, would never in a thousand wild conjectures have guessed the being from whom it emanated. Sparrow was taking tea with his great-aunt at Hollowfoot. No! There was Sparrow in front of him, cool as a cucumber.

For exertion had not flushed that pink-and-white face, nor driven from it its air of resignation. The first to recover his wits, Sparrow raised his cap, and, pointing to a ball which, very white and solitary, lay a few yards ahead, was beginning to explain, when Mr. Eggett, making one eagle-like swoop, seized him by the collar and shook him so vigorously that his teeth could almost be heard rattling. (The caddie, when later on recounting the spectacle, vowed it funnier than anything on the Pictures.)

And Sparrow's partner? He stood white and trembling, wondering whether or no his turn came next. His first impulse had been to cut and run for it. Never before had he played golf under the dignified auspices of a referee, and never again, he told himself, would he do so, as referees scragged fellows who sent for them. Irresolute he stood, prepared for flight directly the angry official should turn towards him.

Then the culprit was released with a vicious push which sent him reeling, swaying to keep his balance.

Mr. Eggett recovered his breath, then cried, "Whatever does this mean? What does it mean?"

With the utmost caution, Sparrow approached him. "Sir," he remarked, as if nothing at all had happened, "I picked up the ball to make sure it was mine——"

"I mean, what are you doing here?" growled Mr. Eggett.

"And Taylor," continued the even voice of the culprit, "says I lose a stroke for picking it up. His caddie says so as well. But I don't think I do."

With equal caution, and before Mr. Eggett could continue, Taylor advanced his version of the point. "When he picked it up, I was standing by him," he declared. "I know he did it only to see whose it was. But, all the same, I believe he loses a stroke. We haven't two caddies to consult, as Sparrow's playing without one."

"Well, he'll play no longer with or without one. Pick your clubs up, Sparrow. Back you come!"

Only Sparrow's lips moved; his feet were rooted. "Sir," he murmured, "I'm doing rather well."

And Mr. Eggett's reply was peculiar. "Let me see your card!" he demanded, gruffly.

Well! The lad was doing better than "well." He had done the first nine in forty-three, and had taken the first four home in an even sixteen. At that rate he stood more than a good chance of qualifying for the championship proper. So, while bending an intent gaze on the card, Mr. Eggett's thoughts veered here and there. In his blood the fever of golf was stirring, and sporting instincts, dormant, awoke clamorously.

Only five more holes to be played, after all—the mischief was done now—and with the lad

playing so finely—interesting, too, to see how he did perform.

He looked up abruptly. "Tell me again," he growled.

So together they told him once more, with the caddie as chorus. And the referee's ruling came without hesitation. "Rule nine," he snapped. "You may lift the ball without penalty. Now, you're keeping the field back. Get a move on with the game."

After waiting some little time for his referee, Mr. Simpson had strolled back to the Club house, congratulating himself upon the tact with which he had managed to soothe Mr. Eggett's disappointment. "I wonder," he mused, "how that queer stick gets on with his boys?"

With one of his boys, at any rate, Mr. Eggett was just then "getting on" somewhat oddly. For, remarking that he could not trust Sparrow out of his sight, he glued himself grimly to the heels of the pair, much with the manner of a surly gaoler guarding his convicts, as it may be, at exercise. He uttered no word, but stalked on austere and watchful.

And instead of putting Sparrow off his game, the presence seemed to lift him above himself.

But not so, alas, with Taylor! That hapless wight found anything but a "splendid spur" in the morose, ungainly figure at his elbow. With always one apprehensive eye on the spectre, he

fluffed and foozled and played his shots nervelessly. He admitted afterwards that he was never sure whether the old chap wouldn't pounce and shake him.

When Sparrow took his mashie at the fifteenth and pitched his ball a couple of yards off the pin, he could have sworn that he heard a bark of delight from behind him. It appeared to have come from the referee. When he turned, Mr. Eggett was looking the other way, and struggling with a violent fit of coughing.

At the sixteenth both players got into trouble, and, about to address his ball in a nasty lie, Sparrow caught again a muffled but earnest entreaty.

"Man, take your——" a whisper seemed urging, and stopped.

He paused. "Sir, what did you say?" he inquired. "Do you think I shouldn't take my iron to this?"

"I did not speak," Mr. Eggett replied stiffly. "It is not for the referee to assist the players."

"But I thought I heard——"

"Get *on* with it!" growled Mr. Eggett.

At the next hole, Sparrow once more played a beautiful mashie shot, and holed out in five, so making himself practically sure if only he escaped disaster at the short last hole. There is no difficulty here, except with the drive, which must carry an awkward sandpit or land you in ruin. Many a medal round has been spoiled here, and often had

Mr. Eggett delved in that pit. He held his breath and trembled as Sparrow teed up.

The ball was slightly topped. Would it rise enough? A groan escaped Mr. Eggett. It looked inevitable that the ball would strike the edge, and be trapped in the pit. The ball did strike the edge, then bounced straight up into the air, to descend and plump itself safe and sound in the fairway. The referee dealt a joyful thump on Sparrow's back.

With his mashie Sparrow placed the ball on the green, and, making no mistake, holed out in three.

Then solemnly the referee shook his hand.

"Sparrow," he said, as they made their way to the Club house, "your mashie is the club you play best. You are astonishingly good with the mashie. Who made the one you are using, by the way?"

Sparrow drew it carelessly from his bag. "I've no idea, sir."

"Well, where did you buy it? I—er—think I may get one like it."

"It doesn't belong to me, sir. Mine is smashed, so I asked the caddie-master to lend me one. He took it from the nearest locker, I fancy. I suppose I'll have to give him a tip for the loan." As he spoke he handed the club to Mr. Eggett.

"Ah," said Mr. Eggett, pursing his lips as he swung the borrowed mashie backwards and forwards. "Now, Sparrow, can you guess to whom this belongs?"

"No, sir," said Sparrow. He spoke without animation, all his listlessness returning now the game was over. And, indeed, he had shown an indifference to his good score which, if not genuine, was marvellously assumed.

"No, sir," he repeated. "I've no idea."

Mr. Eggett's manner was that of the class-room again. "Not only," he snapped, "do you run away and play golf, but you have the impertinence, Sparrow, to play with my mashie. With *my* mashie, Sparrow. This came out of my locker."

"It's a jolly good one, sir," Sparrow murmured.

"And the caddie-master lent it you, the scoundrel!" Mr. Eggett was smiling again. He hesitated. "Well, you use it better than I do. Here! You can keep it."

"I say, sir——" Sparrow had begun, but the other stopped him. "Well, I'll just find Simpson, and we'll go back to School. See that your card is sent in properly. You've qualified, no doubt, and now perhaps you'll explain why you told me you were going to Hollowfoot?"

Sparrow's eye gleamed again with the joy of the fray. He went in quickly, washed, and returned his card, and, having bidden good-bye to Taylor, still somewhat bedazed, shouldered his clubs and went meekly with his inquisitor.

"You know, sir," he said pleasantly, breaking the silence, "I never told you that I was going to Hollowfoot."

"You didn't?" rapped Mr. Eggett. "Be careful, Sparrow."

"No, sir. Do you remember just what I said?"

"My memory never fails, Sparrow."

"All I said was that if I had an *exeat* after third lesson I could get to Hollowfoot by half-past one."

"You acted a lie, Sparrow."

"But sir! I never said I was going there!"

"And the great-aunt at the bridge? Does she exist, Sparrow?"

"Yes, sir," said Sparrow smoothly. "She's eighty-four. And she can read, and hear, and hop about like a young woman."

"Indeed!" drawled Mr. Eggett. "A marvellous old lady. I wonder, Sparrow, if you'll live to eighty-four!"

Sparrow sighed, and jumped at his opportunity. "Not if I stay, sir, at Castlegate. It's undermining my constitution. It is really." He paused. "But, sir, if you had asked whether I was going to Hollowfoot——"

"Well?"

"Why, then, sir," said Sparrow, sadly, "you would have had me."

"Ah! Well, after Chapel you will report in my study."

And that evening when he had restored his cane to its cupboard, and while the leader in the qualifying round was cupping his smarting palms and

blowing upon them, Mr. Eggett observed dryly that after reflection he would not report Sparrow's escapade to the Head.

"There is no actual rule against you boys playing golf, Sparrow, and, as you have now been punished, here's an end to the matter."

Watching the culprit closely as he spoke, he marked how the dismal features grew more depressed.

"But, sir, if the Head knew perhaps he'd——"

"Expel you, Sparrow? No, not a bit of it." Mr. Eggett emitted a gentle chuckle. "Besides, you are very much better at Castlegate, which one day possibly will produce a golf champion."

"But, sir," said Sparrow, "I'm not keen on golf really. My brother makes me play a bit at home, but I only entered that silly old round for a rag. And I've never played nearly as well as I did to-day, and——"

Mr. Eggett cut him short. "Good night!" he snapped.

Chapter V

"Six—One—Seven—Thr-rr-reee Castlegate"

"**A**H," said Mr. Eggett, raising his head, "still unhappy at Castlegate, Sparrow, what?"

"Most," sighed Sparrow, with an air of *Ultima Thule*.

Mr. Eggett pursed his lips. "A pity!" he snapped. His indigestion was vexing him sorely to-day.

He had felt that he might be inviting ill consequences by taking that excellent pickled pork yesterday. But he had taken it with his eyes open; a little arrogantly, perhaps, in the sense of well-being with which his spare frame had been fortified by golf. But it looked as if golf had flattered to deceive. True, his handicap was down by a point or two. But his indigestion was up in arms again.

"A pity," he repeated, stroking his beard; "because you leave me without alternative, Sparrow."

Sparrow abided events in a cautious silence.

"I have sent for you, my dear lad——"

Having discovered that Sparrow hated being addressed as his "dear lad," Mr. Eggett broke off short to watch the effect. But Sparrow gave no sign that he had heard. His dejected gaze was fixed with a studied indifference on the telephone at Mr. Eggett's elbow.

"My dear lad, I have sent for you to inform you that I must try another method with you. I have been, I think, too lenient with you, Sparrow."

"Yes, sir," said Sparrow promptly. "You should expel me."

"Time enough!" rapped Mr. Eggett irritably,

as a twitch of pain distorted his sallow features. "I don't think you'll like the measures I'm going to adopt with you. But you leave me no option, Sparrow. I have exhausted kindly reproof."

"Yes, sir," sighed Sparrow, shifting his gaze to the cane-cupboard. Mr. Eggett rose with a groan, and, occupying the hearthrug, directed a lean accusing finger at Sparrow.

"You played the perfect ass in Brackell's window. I caned you. You wrote an appalling and mendacious testimonial. I caned you again. After almost poisoning me at Christmas, Sparrow, you gluttonized here instead of going home. You gave your parent acute anxiety, and all the punishment you got was another caning. Then you ran away behind my back to play golf—Well, what is it?"

The angry man had broken his recital short to fling this inquiry at Willett, who had just entered.

"Please, sir, may I go to the Pictures?"

Sparrow turned one long sad look on his friend, who, in excuse for not repaying the ninepence he owed, had pleaded absolute poverty ten minutes since, and was now proposing to treat himself to the Pictures.

"The kinēma," Mr. Eggett corrected, wincing. "Can you go to the kinēma, Willett. Why?"

"Sir," said Willett, avoiding Sparrow's eye, "you forget there's the big educational film on

this week—with a lecture, sir, you know—all about Borneo——”

“I do *not* know, Willett. But proceed.”

“Well, the Head said it would do us good, sir, and anyone could go if he got permission.”

“Do you mean, Willett, if the Head got permission?”

“No, sir,” said Willett, with a weak, dutiful smile.

“Don’t smirk!” rapped the tortured man, as fresh qualms racked him. “And learn to be precise in your statements, Willett. Yes, you can go to the Pic—er—the kinēma.”

Willett departed, still evading his creditor’s gaze, and Mr. Eggett took up the thread of his discourse.

“So, Sparrow, you and I will make a new start. I am about to adopt other measures. Preventative measures. One moment.” He went to the telephone on his table, and, removing the receiver, pressed one of the four buttons which communicated with other instruments in the School. “That you, Matron?” he inquired. “Mr. Eggett speaking. Yes. Is Bullock better? Has he left the infirmary?”

Sparrow caught the responsive metallic mumble, and speculated on Mr. Eggett’s new policy. His features had assumed their gloomiest pose when dyspepsia’s victim hung up the receiver.

“Ah, come in, Bullock!”

The new-comer had a truculent air and red ears,

and wore three waistcoats. He did not look like a man just out of the infirmary, as he planted his large feet heavily, frowning at Sparrow.

"You fit again, Bullock?" Mr. Eggett inquired.

"Yes, sir," growled Bullock, in a voice that came from his boots.

"Good! Well, you won't be able to play football awhile yet. The pack will miss you, Bullock. It isn't everyone who can score a try with three men hanging on one arm and two on the other. But I've a job for you, Bullock. You'll find it quite as interesting as football——"

He gasped and started, every suffering nerve on the jar, as a hideous piercing noise thrilled its way through the room. Recovering himself, he dashed to the telephone. "What is it?" he barked furiously through the mouthpiece. And, grasping the receiver with trembling fingers, "This abominable thing will be my death!" he groaned.

Six weeks ago, when the 'phones had been installed, no one was more delighted than Mr. Eggett. But then his indigestion had retired *pro tem*. Wherefore, when the Head had announced his intention of having an instrument for his own use and one for the Matron's, "and, yes, I think," he had added, "one for the Common Room," Mr. Eggett had applauded his enterprise, tentatively observing, "What of my room?"

because his mathematical mind had swooped immediately on the ratio of a telephone to golf, visioning the equation in this manner:—

Let x = the telephone,
 y = the links.

Then $x + y = a$, a partner fixed up comfortably beforehand; and b , unknown quantities of general convenience.

But at that time, let it be repeated, the spectre of indigestion had ceased to stalk, and life and the world were good, were splendidly good. *Then* the voice of the 'phone was a dulcet warble and its messages but pleasant pipings. *Now* the screech of the 'phone was a raucous torture and its interruptions nerve-racking shocks.

"Yes! I am 6-1-7-3 Castlegate. Six one seven three. *Thr-rr-ree!* Yes, what is it?"

"*It*" introduced itself as the local chemist, ringing up to inquire regarding his customer's new medicine. Mr. Eggett's note had not been quite decipherable—was it more Digesto Mr. E. wanted?

"No!" bellowed Mr. Eggett. "For heaven's sake, NO!"

His audience could hear every word that was spoken, and the duologue proceeded more or less thus:—

Voice through 'phone: "Well, why not try——"

Mr. Eggett (with a moan): "I've tried it."

Voice: "Baker's Syrup——"

Mr. E. (snapping) : “ I’ve tried Baker’s Syrup.”

Voice : “ Many doctors are recommending Stapp’s Emulsion.”

Mr. E. (despairingly) : “ I’ve tried it.”

Voice : “ Well, shall we make you up a little——”

Mr. E. : “ I’ve tried——”

Voice : “ No, sir ; no, no. You haven’t tried our——”

Mr. E. (more savage than ever) : “ The last nearly killed me.”

But eventually, and after some lively exchanges, Mr. Eggett and the chemist came to terms, and the audience caught the latter’s brisk peroration :—

“ Yes, yes, sir ; you can rely on us. We’ll send it up on Saturday afternoon certain. Without fail, sir. On Saturday afternoon. Good-bye ! ”

“ Good-bye ! ” roared Mr. Eggett. “ And don’t you fail me ! ”

Wiping from his brow the hot beads of anguish, he sank into his chair and beckoned them closer. “ Bullock,” he remarked, in exhausted tones, “ I sent for you because Sparrow needs a keeper. Oh, yes, I am serious,” he went on, as Bullock stared. “ And now you can no longer play football, Bullock, you are the very man for the little job. Bullock, look after Sparrow. Keep him out of mischief.”

He was watching Sparrow to see how he would take it, but not a sign escaped that emotionless

youth, who seemed lost in contemplation of Bullock's waistcoats. Then, wincing under his pangs, he gestured them off.

Bullock squared his shoulders and truculent jaw, and having extracted from his boots a hoarse gurgle, which might have been a growl of assent or a laugh, he glared at Sparrow, and remarked succinctly:—

“March!”

And out marched Sparrow meekly, in front of his keeper.

II

The latter lost not a second in beginning his duties. Taking his charge under his robust wing, he set him at once to brushing his three waistcoats; next to clean his bike and screw up the nuts; whereafter, when he had eaten all Sparrow's biscuits, he thrust a flag into his hand and led him forth to shiver on the touchline for a kids' game. Later, he filched his charge's eventide leisure by compelling him not only to do his prep., but to show it up for his, Bullock's, correction, which, incidentally, turned out all wrong next morning.

To Sparrow, just completing the fifty lines received for his keeper's talented assistance, and meditating—since this was Wednesday—a swift retreat to seclusion after dinner, came Bullock, jingling money in his hand.

“Sparrow,” said he, “have you lived in London at all?”

Sparrow dabbed up a blot and shook his head.

“Oh,” said Bullock. “Well, in London, you know, if we want a good seat in a theatre and can’t book beforehand, we engage messenger-boys to line up till the doors are open. They stand in the queue for us, and bag us a seat.”

“Do they?” said Sparrow. “How nice of them!”

“Yes, very,” smiled Bullock, rattling his money. “Sparrow, here is one shilling and threepence. Shilling admission; threepence entertainment-tax.” He laid the coins, as he spoke, on the blotting-paper.

“Thank you,” lisped Sparrow. “But I’m not going to an entertainment.”

“Oh yes, you are,” said Bullock decisively. “We are both of us going in partnership to the Pictures.”

Sparrow shook his head. “I hate Pictures,” he murmured.

“That’s fine, because you won’t have to see them,” said Bullock. “You see, Sparrow, you and I are Picture-partners. *You* go and wait in the queue and bag a seat. *I* come along at the start and use the seat. Nifty notion!”

“Very,” Sparrow demurred. “But the doors aren’t open till two o’clock, and the performance doesn’t start till half-past, Bullock. I know,

because Willett went yesterday. He says they begin to queue up soon after one. He says there's a most unholy squash. And to-day's early closing ! ”

Bullock produced from the depths his mighty laugh. “ Sparrow, you'll trot out of dinner at a quarter-past one. No, don't worry, I've got leave for you. You'll pop straight down and get me a jolly good seat.” He cocked his head and scrutinized Sparrow severely. “ And I'll relieve you at half-past two to the tick.”

“ You'll be sure to come ? ” said Sparrow, with the utmost docility, and pocketed the money as the bell rang for dinner.

III

Yesterday's drizzle had become a blizzard to-day. The rain was falling straight down, with intermissions for sleet, and an icy wind did not temper it to the shorn lamb. Not that there appeared to be any shorn lambs among the crowd lined up at the Picture-house door ; but one wretched being, whose nose was blue with cold, whose teeth were chattering and fingers numbed, compared himself to a sheep that has lost its fleece and wished that he had borrowed Bullock's three waistcoats. His overcoat was but a sorry protection. And from his neighbour's umbrella inquisitive drippings coursed their eager way across his cheek.

Sparrow had arrived at 1.24, but only in time for a place at the tail of the queue. Two was about to strike now, and the queue had grown, to stretch like a draggled serpent to the corner, wedging in its midst Bullock's hapless partner and flattening in his pocket the treacle-tart that he had brought to eat when he got inside. A stout man stamped occasionally on his toes, and twice the good woman behind him sneezed down his neck.

He turned up his coat collar and went on shivering. Then, craning outwards, he espied a few paces in front a back and shoulders pleasantly familiar. The head on the shoulders, turning simultaneously, disclosed the plump face of "Mr. G. Brackell & Sons."

But a flutter in front and a lunge behind proclaimed the opening of the palatial portals. Bobbing like a cork upon the waters, poked in the small of the back and knocked in the ribs, Sparrow was crushed, squeezed, thumped, and projected forward until, presently, he arrived at a gold-braided admiral, who inquired hoarsely who he thought he was pushing? But, seeing that he had no breath left to answer, the janitor relaxed and speeded him on with a shove that landed him into the vestibule and into the arms of Mr. Brackell.

"We'll sit together," quoth the gentlemen's outfitter.

And there we can leave young Sparrow, out of the rain.

Bullock enjoyed his dinner very much. When he remarked his intention of going to the Pictures, and was told that he'd find no room unless he made haste, he closed one eyelid and rejoined that you learned a good many dodges in London. "You see," he explained, "I'm looking after young Sparrow. Now, where do you think Sparrow is at this moment, Palethorpe?"

"How should I know," rapped Palethorpe.

"He's standing in the queue to bag me a seat. He mopped up the arrangement like a bird. I'm keen, you know, on seeing that film with the lecture." Bullock passed his plate for more treacle-tart. "And there's a topping cowboy film first, I believe."

His wrist-watch indicated 2.15 when he bent his dignified progress towards the town. He went comfortably, for the rain had rained itself out, and shafts of humid sunshine attended his steps. At 2.27 he arrived at the gold-braided flag-captain, who informed him there was neither sitting nor standing room. But when a sixpence had changed hands, with the information that the late comer's seat was being kept for him, the commander's finger went to his braided cap, and Bullock passed into the vestibule.

Here he tarried to purchase a programme (6d.) and a box of chocolates (1s.). He also enjoyed a

lemon-squash at the tea buffet; then apprised by fitful squeakings from the interior that the orchestra was tuning up for its overture, he pushed through the swing doors and into the theatre. As the gloom of Avernus had not yet descended on the scene, he needed no maiden's torch to illumine his feet, and, striding down the gangway, he soon detected his faithful fore-runner loyally in a seat.

And a capital seat it was! You could wish no better.

Bullock wished no better, at any rate. Plumb in the middle of the seventh row from the front; just the position he would have selected himself! Reflecting that Sparrow was not such an ass as he looked, he coughed to attract his attention. He coughed again. And then, in the voice that came from his boots, he called, "Sparrow!"

Sparrow looked up and gave him a pleasant nod ere resuming his conversation with Mr. Brackell. The bass viol in the orchestra emitted a *brumph*!

Leaning over two farmer-like gentlemen at the end of the row, Bullock repeated Sparrow's name with more emphasis, to which Sparrow replied with a bright look of recognition, which said, so far as looks can say anything:—

"Halloa, Bullock, old bean! What are *you* doing here?"

A terrible misgiving turned Bullock cold. Was the little beast going to play him false?

"Come out of it!" he roared. "Come out of it, Sparrow!"

But the only answer was the bass viol's *gr-grumph!*

This was clearly no moment for standing on ceremony. So, edging his way past the two farmers, Bullock had managed to squeeze a few paces down, with the object of removing his partner by force, when a portly dame, in an imitation seal coat, barred his further advance with arm and leg.

"You can't pass here, young man!" she observed stoutly.

"Madam," said Bullock frostily, "I have a seat."

"Then the sooner you find it, the better!" retorted the dame.

After a penultimate squawk from the fiddles, a pipe from the flute, and a rasp from the 'cello, the orchestra struck up; and the plot thickened. That is to say, while Sparrow smiled gently in his seat, an altercation raged round the raging Bullock, whom willing hands had thrust back into the gangway.

"But I tell you"—he pointed at Sparrow—"he's got my seat!"

"He's been there half an hour!" cried the lady. "You fibber!"

With a scowl that should have frozen his partner's marrow, Bullock thundered orders of ejection, till it fell to Mr. Brackell's presence

of mind to find the way out of a threatening situation. He dispatched a programme damsel for the attendant.

Wiping his mouth, and minus Bullock's sixpence, the admiral puffed up to the scene of combat. And alas! for the ingratitude of admirals, for at once he sided with the man in possession. "Very sorry, sir," said he, "but you can't stand here. No standing in the gangways. Now, come along, please!"

Surrendering the unequal contest, Bullock shook his fist at Sparrow by way of adieu, and declared that he would stand with the crush round the sides. The admiral rejoined that he would *not*. There wasn't another inch of room in the hall. "Very sorry, sir, but you must come along."

So Bullock "went along." There was nothing else for it. With his programme (6d.) and his box of chocolates (1s.) he retraced his furious way to the School. But he told himself that he would not divulge to a soul how his messenger-boy had stuck to his seat for him.

As "even the weariest river wends somewhere safe to sea," so eventually in the Picture Palace, meanwhile, the orchestra landed its overture safely home to make way for a long and exciting Wild West film. But it was not too long for Sparrow and Mr. Brackell, who responded to every flicker and every thrill. Came topical events, and then some more orchestra, to allow

the lecturer—maybe—a last run through his notes. But the music arrested itself suddenly in the middle of a bar. A white circle appeared on the screen, and the audience began to spell out with much interest a message that unrolled itself thereon:—

If a boy from Castlegate School called Sparrow is here, he is required at once at the School. MOST URGENT.

Sparrow jumped up, not without relief, for he had meditated cutting the lecture in any event, reflecting that the daily round and the common task furnished all that he needed to ask in that line. So, pausing only to accept a cascade of disinfectant squirted by a button-boy from a hand-pump—Sparrow believed in getting his money's worth—he took his departure and hastened on his way back, to be greeted at the avenue gate by Willett.

“You're to go,” said Willett, “straight to the Egg's study.”

“But I thought the Egg was playing golf!” exclaimed Sparrow.

“You're to go straight along!” cried Willett, dancing off.

Sparrow tapped gently, and, opening the door without noise, found himself in the midst of a telephone discourse. But the figure at the instrument was neither bearded nor spare, but truculent in aspect and wearing three waistcoats. Standing quite still, Sparrow listened a moment.

“Did you throw that notice on the screen? Oh, you did! Good! Has the chap left, do you know? You’ll go and inquire. Right-o! I’ll hold the line——”

And, holding the line, Bullock turned, and observed Sparrow.

At once he banged back the receiver and swooped upon Sparrow.

“So I’ve got you!” he growled.

Sparrow smiled. “The cowboy picture was simply topping!” he answered.

Then Bullock took measures which marked his striking disapproval of his Picture-partner’s unfaithfulness.

When he had finished, Sparrow returned to his pocket one shilling and three pennies that he had had ready in hand. For, as he protested to Willett afterwards, “I’m hanged if I was going to return him his money after he had taken its worth out in clouts!”

“No; much better lend it a chap,” concurred Willett heartily.

It was with the conclusion that telephones may be abused that Sparrow took his place that evening at tea, and purchased for twopence Willett’s bread-and-scrape to fill up the crevices left by his puddingless dinner.

“Yes, telephones,” said he to himself, “are a nuisance.”

IV

Mr. Eggett should never have taken crumpets.

Yet he did so with his tea at the Golf Club on Saturday, in the abstraction, no doubt, of two rubbers of bridge for which he tarried after his round with the secretary.

There had been no need for him to hurry back. The School was playing Greenchester at Greenchester, and, saving Mr. Green, on duty, and himself, all the staff and most of the seniors had accompanied the XV. They could not be home till nearly seven o'clock.

That hour was striking as he turned into the avenue at a trot. Dinner? The crumpets were taking care that he wanted no dinner, yet convention required that he show himself at the masters' table. Squashing his cap into his pocket, he rushed straight into Hall, where he heard the news of the match, consumed one piece of bread, and, excusing himself, hied, sallow and groaning, to his room, where, he remembered, his new medicine would be waiting. He would take a dose at once. Ah, comforting prospect!

No medicine was there.

He searched his room, and rang for the House manservant. No, nothing had come from the chemist's that afternoon. Was the man quite sure. Yes; absolutely.

Irate of eye and yellow as to the gills, Mr.

Eggett snapped the servant to take himself off, and, pouncing on his telephone, plucked the receiver.

“Are you there?” he demanded. “Halloa! Are you there?”

He waited for fifty seconds, but nothing happened. No accents, dulcet or fretful, replied “Number, please?”

Thereupon his impatient palm descended sharply and struck the receiver's rest smart, staccato blows. This he continued to do for some little time, when, clenching his teeth, he seized it and rattled it vigorously. Then once more he bellowed through the patient and gaping mouthpiece.

But still from the shrouded distance no voice responded.

Having paused to rehearse his remarks to the operator when she did answer, he attacked the instrument with redoubled fury. He banged the rest up and down till it ought to have broken. And when he judged he had given it enough this time, he pressed the receiver again to his choleric ear.

But the deadest silence pervaded the line.

“Out of order!” he gasped. “Of course it would be. Just when I *must* have my medicine before to-night.”

But, happy thought! He would run off and use the Matron's.

He found that lady suffering from a bad head-

ache ; she had been lying down all the afternoon, she informed him. But Mr. Eggett, who knew the cure for everything—except, as might seem, his own malady—immediately prescribed Grubbe's One Minute Powders. "I'll tell the chemist to send them up with my medicine."

He did not tell the chemist.

Never had the Matron admired Mr. Eggett so much as when he had concluded his monologue. She had deemed him a spiritless soul, although distantly aware that his command of Surds was profound and extensive. But she had not figured him as a master of languages. Yet he addressed that mouthpiece in English and French and High Dutch, without the use of one word unfit for her ears.

His efforts left him as far off the chemist as ever.

"I will use the one in our Common Room," he exclaimed.

"And you won't forget my powders," the Matron reminded him.

Into the Common Room strode the harassed man, but ere he could lay so much as a finger on the instrument, from the depths of a basket chair rose Mr. Green's voice.

"Nothing doing!" it exclaimed cheerfully. "I've been trying for ten minutes, Eggett. Can't make 'em hear."

Could Mr. Eggett have laid his hands on the chemist that instant, he would have wrung his

faithless neck like a Christmas turkey's. But this trifling consolation being out of reach, he hastened away to the sole resource that was left.

He must use the Head's 'phone. He *must* use the Head's 'phone. He couldn't wait till to-morrow. There was nothing else for it.

And, thank goodness, the Head's 'phone would be all right for certain!

It was only when he stood outside the Head's dining-room, wherein the instrument graced the table in the window, that he remembered Mr. Games was giving a dinner-party to-night. Could he intrude and disturb the party at their dinner? A virulent pang settled his hesitation.

They had just finished the soup when he entered diffidently, to receive at once Mr. Games's gracious permission. In the ripple of talk and clink of plates he must strain his ears to catch the operator's reply. But when none came he raised his voice desperately.

Mr. Games rose and laid down his table-napkin. "No answer?" he said smiling. "Here, let me try, Eggett!" His tones were large and condescending, and clearly conveyed "I understand the thing so much better than you do."

"What number do you want, Eggett?"

"Local, 2-1," responded his tortured subordinate.

For him the party had not stopped their chatter, but with their host on the 'phone every tongue

stood still. The Head approached the mouth-piece benevolently, inquiring if it was there with easy confidence. And after a pause he repeated the question dispassionately.

Next, with a vibrant lilt, he asked, "Are you there?" This time all caught the note of command in his accents.

And then—"Are you there?"

And finally—"Are you *there*? Ar-re you *there*?"

This brought an officious guest to his feet at once. "Ah, Games, let me show you," he bade consequentially. "I ought to know how to handle those lazy lasses." And, fussing his way to the instrument, he proceeded to demonstrate.

His demonstration was singularly entertaining. But it did not extract any news of the operator's whereabouts.

Purple of face, he returned to his pheasant, now cold.

The Head was no believer in putting things off. And to-morrow was Sunday. So that in barely five minutes you might have beheld the odd-man astride his cycle, bound for Castlegate to lodge complaint at the telephone exchange, and strictly charged to see the manager himself.

"You will tell him," Mr. Games had said, "how disgusted I am. It is positively scandalous, you will tell him, that all four instruments should be out of order simultaneously." Then he turned to Mr. Eggett, and bade him join them:

“And may I help you to trifle?” pressed Mrs. Games.

The sufferer suppressed a groan, and complied.

v

“Well, Peters?”

Handing Mr. Eggett the white-papered packet for which he had called at the chemist's upon his way, Peters reported that he had been to the exchange. “The manager,” he told the Head, “had left, sir. He'd gone to his residence, sir; so I followed him up.”

“Quite right,” said the Head.

“But he seemed a bit—er, short, sir, to be disturbed. It appears he was—er, entertaining a few friends, sir.”

“And what about myself!” the Head broke in.

“Just so, sir. And so I took leave to tell him. Most disgusted you was, I said to him, sir, and he says, ‘What! Why he told me to disconnect ’em!’ He said as how you had given instructions, sir, to have the instruments disconnected because of the cost.”

The Head could only stare his astonishment.

Enjoying the sensation he was creating, Peters rippled on with his narrative. “He says how, in accordance with your own instructions, sir, he sent a man up to disconnect ’em this afternoon. He says the man grumbled because it

was Saturday, sir; but as how he insisted on having it done this afternoon to oblige *you*. He says you explained this afternoon would be most convenient, as it wouldn't interfere, you all being away——”

The Head cut him short. “Has the man taken leave of his senses?”

“So I made bold to ask of him myself, sir. He seemed a little—er, ruffled—not to say quite put out, sir.”

The Head turned to the parlourmaid, who was placing the port on the table. “Nellie, have you seen any telephone man?”

The damsel simpered. “Oh yes, sir,” she replied. “A man came to see to the telephone this afternoon, and as he said he had just come from the Matron's and Mr. Eggett's, I knew it must be all right, and I let him in here, sir.”

“And the manager's compliments,” the loquacious Peters went on, “and he told me to give you this, sir, if you please. He seemed a trifle—er, hasty-like; and he said that perhaps you'd recognize your own message, sir.” With which he handed his master a typewritten sheet.

Mr. Games studied this with bewilderment; then exclaimed “Eggett?”

But Mr. Eggett had risen noiselessly and slipped out. He had recognized, or thought so, that typewriting.

"And *what* induced you, Sparrow?" Mr. Eggett was concluding.

"Sir, it was so easy to slip down on Friday."

"I mean, what persuaded you to so much impertinence? To such an outrage, Sparrow! To such an outrage!"

Sparrow searched his face with melancholy eyes.

"The Head is exceedingly angry. Extremely angry, Sparrow."

A flicker of hope now dawned upon the sad features.

"Hold your hand out, Sparrow!" rapped Mr. Eggett.

Chapter VI

Firmness and Severity

MR. EGGETT stared musingly at Bullock's large ears, which shone redder than ever this crisp March morning.

"And what do you want?" he asked.

Bullock seemed uncertain how to begin.

"And, by the way, Bullock," Mr. Eggett continued pleasantly, "I'm glad to hear you are better. Up to football again, eh? Will you be well enough to play against the Garrison next Saturday?"

Bullock felt on firmer ground at once. "I hope so, sir," he said readily. "Next Thursday I'm trying my knee in a junior pick-up. If it stands it, I shall turn out next Saturday."

“ Good ! ” remarked Mr. Eggett. “ That’s capital.”

Just now he felt in exceedingly fine trim. His book on Surds was carrying all before it, and promised to add to the trials of youth for generations. His golf handicap had been reduced to fifteen. And he could face his victuals like a Mathematician and a Man ; for the fiend of indigestion was on the run, whether or no scared by the chemist’s new potion. On this Mr. Eggett would not commit himself, but would only tell you, as he had told the Head yesterday, how vigorous he felt, how thrustful, how hard—hard ; yes, that was the word he wanted—physically and mentally *hard*.

“ Well ? ” he repeated. “ And what is it you want, Bullock ? ”

Bullock’s fingers began to play nervously with the bottom button of his three waistcoats. Looking everywhere but at Mr. Eggett, he stammered :

“ I’ve come to resign, sir ! ”

“ To resign ? ” exclaimed Mr. Eggett. “ To resign what ? ”

“ Looking after Sparrow,” Bullock said thickly.

Sitting quite still and leaning a little forward, a hand on each knee, Mr. Eggett searched him with a thoughtful gaze. “ But you were so pleased,” he said presently, “ to undertake the—er—duty.”

“ Sir, I had more time then,” Bullock mumbled.

“ Ah,” said Mr. Eggett, “ I see, I see.” And

somehow his tone seemed to hint that he "saw" a great deal. "Well, tell me, Bullock. How have you handled the lad?"

"I've been jolly kind to him," answered Bullock gruffly. "I even helped him with his work, sir. But he never said 'Thank you!'"

"Most ungrateful," agreed Mr. Eggett, with a queer smile.

"And I let him clean my motor-bike. Every bit of it."

"Most ungrateful," Mr. Eggett reiterated.

"And I shared his biscuits with him, sir."

"Most considerate!"

"And I let him get me a seat at the Pictures, sir."

Mr. Eggett shuddered. "The kinēma," he sighed.

"And the little sweep stuck to my seat. And now the story's got all over the School, and you know, sir, how fellows——"

"Trying!" interjected Mr. Eggett. "Very trying." Rising, he squared his sparse shoulders. How strong he felt!

"Bullock," he said decisively, "persevere. Apparently you have tried kindness without result."

Bullock's hand at his waistcoat encountered a grease smear, which had not been there before Sparrow cleaned the waistcoat, "Not quite, sir," he growled, "without result."

"It is now time to try firmness. Firmness, Bullock; tempered with severity."

Bullock stared. He had never heard the Old Egg speak in a tone of so much vigorous hardness. It was like listening almost to a keen-edged knife.

"Persevere, Bullock. Firmness and severity."

"Yes, sir," he mumbled.

He had not exaggerated in indicating to Mr. Eggett that the story of How Sparrow Had Kept His Seat For Him At The Pictures had added little to his self-esteem and less to his dignity. In fact, he seemed unlikely to hear the last of it. Palethorpe, who, being his friend, should have known better, never tired, for instance, of inquiring at meals when he was thinking of going to the Pictures next; and he was not rendered more amiable in class by receiving stealthy notes with the same inquiry. It was Palethorpe he sought now, hot-foot from Mr. Eggett.

Bullock never beat about a bush, or he would not have been the fine Rugger forward he was. Planting his large feet squarely, he cornered Palethorpe. "Pales," he growled, "you call yourself my pal. Well, next time you mention Pictures I'll punch your head."

"I thought only errand boys punched heads," said Palethorpe languidly.

"And I'll tell you another thing, Pales. I haven't finished with young Sparrow yet."

"But you told me you were chucking looking after him!"

"Ah," grunted Bullock. "Well, I've changed

my mind. I'm going to start on a new tack with the young Spadger. But that's not your concern. A new tack, Pales. A new tack altogether."

"Good luck to you, Ox!"

"But what I've come to say to you is this. The Picture joke is played out. It's dead as mutton. And anyone who pulls my leg any more is going to see more pictures than he'll ever see on the screen."

And straightening his huge and truculent form, Bullock scowled twice at his friend and went heavily off.

II

Sparrow took his football lugubriously. He pursued it without any real *joie-de-vivre*. Yet, if the spirit moved him, he was capable of appearing to be trying with startling results; having been known to collar men on his own side efficiently. He would tell you that he did not care for football (as he had told Mr. Eggett that he did not care for golf).

Certainly, he abhorred junior pick-ups, which he managed generally to avoid. To Willett, when he came before dinner on Thursday to borrow threepence (without any success) Sparrow revealed a plan for the afternoon which promised considerable relief to the daily round. But he was reckoning without his Bullock.

His keeper found him immediately after dinner.

"Young Spadger," said he, "get into your things at once. This afternoon you're going to play Rugger like blazes."

"Thank you," Sparrow said nicely, "but I am not. I have a great-aunt at Hollowfoot——"

"Come off it!" snapped Bullock.

"And, anyhow, Thursday pick-ups are not compulsory."

"Ho!" roared Bullock. "Well, to-day is compulsory. It's compulsory for you, young Spadger, my son! And I'm going to play myself to help you along."

"Is it wise," Sparrow murmured politely, "to risk your knee?"

Bullock grinned. "You'll risk more, unless you buck up. You're playing in the scrum. On *my* side, Sparrow."

"How jolly!" lisped Sparrow.

"Yes, it will be——jolly." Bullock's repartee was like himself; it never went beating or finicking round its bush. "I'll see you don't slack. No winging, Spadger, my beauty. You'll shove like a horse."

"Shall I?" asked Sparrow, in a tone of agreeable surprise. "Still, I've an aunt——"

Further protest ended in dumb show. He was steered off by the ear to the changing-room.

When presently he stepped on to the field, his pensive features were charged with high resignation. As an early martyr may have stepped forth

to the lions, so stepped Sparrow in the wake of his keeper.

Yet others on the ground appeared more uncomfortable. For (to carry the analogy further) it seemed to the juniors, as they pranced to keep themselves warm, that they would be butchered to make a Roman holiday. For *Roman* read *Bullock*, and the idea is yours. On the other hand, they may have been overjoyed with the honour of figuring as triers-out of Bullock's knee ; but if they were their faces did not disclose it.

Swinging the ball by its lace, the trout eyed his minnows. Then having tarried to offer last words of encouragement to Sparrow, he kicked off and followed up with thundering feet.

Little doubt that in the ordinary way Trollope Minor would have caught the ball safely enough. But at the sight of Bullock thundering towards him (that great figure which, as the School will never forget, fought its way over the line against the Hornets with three men hanging on one arm and two on the other) Trollope Minor emitted one little squeal and dropped the ball at his toes. Where it lay an instant.

Yet one instant only. The next Bullock had recovered it ; and, looking behind him, bawled stentorially :

" Sparrow ! "

Sparrow trotted up. " Here I am," he remarked. With a shake of his heavy shoulders which

tossed off two enemies, Bullock flung him the ball contemptuously. "Now, score!" he cried. "You've got a clear run in."

No International at Twickenham could have tucked that ball more deftly under his arm than Sparrow did. And no one of his size at Castlegate could have run so fast as Sparrow ran for goal. But, unhappily, he ran towards his own goal; where he planted the ball beneath the posts very proudly. This done, he lingered, waiting his meed of praise.

It is impossible to do justice to Bullock's feelings, although he did his best to express them fittingly, so that Sparrow's ears were tingling when the game was resumed.

One would fain have cause to sing Sparrow's prowess, but with this effort he seems to have shot his bolt. It is true that under the vigilant eye of his keeper he was first down in every scrum, where he puffed and panted noisily without ceasing. You might also have seen him trotting up and down; and have caught his high-pitched plaudits every time his captain blazed a trail through a mass of minnows. But he did not get his hands to the ball again.

Bullock, of course, took the game very easily. Having walked across with as many tries as he wanted, and satisfied himself that his knee was sound, he began to give his forwards lessons in heeling from the scrum.

"Now, heel, you little sweeps! *Heel!*" you heard him bellowing.

His forwards must have been particularly clumsy. For constantly while he was adjuring them from the heart of the scrum, he would feel his own heels sharply stubbed by some toe awkwardly zealous to obey his behest. And eventually, when on the fringe of the pack his heel experienced a smarter hack than before, he turned very swiftly just in time to detect Sparrow (who appeared to be acting as a supplementary half-back) withdrawing his foot in a manner highly suspicious.

"Sorry!" Sparrow puffed. "Frightfully sorry, Bullock!"

His captain took him by the scruff of the neck and thrust him into the midst of the straining scrum. "You've made my heel raw!" he growled.

And thus saying, he dropped back to three-quarter, where he enjoyed himself till the game ended.

But it did not end there for the ill-starred Sparrow. Its epilogue was spoken after tea, when Bullock asked him what he meant by it? As *it* had not been given a definition, Sparrow waited, with a patient eye on the three waistcoats. "You kicked me on purpose!" roared Bullock, elucidating. "You hacked my heel lots of times. It's no good denying it."

Sparrow made no effort to deny anything. All he answered was, "You told us to heel!"

"And did I tell you to score a try the wrong way?"

"No," said Sparrow brightly. "I thought of that."

"Very well, young Sparrow," Bullock observed, taking up a letter which had come by the afternoon's post and scrutinizing the writing on the envelope. "Very well, young Sparrow. Now listen to me. I have tried you with kindness. I am going to try you with firmness."

"Please, are you still looking after me?" lisped Sparrow.

"I am," said Bullock. "With firmness; tempered—that was Eggett's word—with severity. With severity, Sparrow. Do you understand?"

"Aren't you going to open your letter, Bullock?"

"That can wait a sec. Now, first for severity." Here Bullock shot out his hand and gripped Sparrow's arm. "For playing the fool at footer and for hacking my heels, I must give you six clouts." And swiftly and deftly he fulfilled his promise.

Sparrow accepted "severity" like a Stoic. When it was over, he asked if he might go?

"Oh no, young Sparrow. Now we come to firmness. I've clouted you for your cheek this afternoon. Now I'm going to try firmness to keep you straight. Turn out your pockets."

"But you won't find firmness in my pockets!" gasped Sparrow.

"Turn them out!"

There was nothing for it but to obey. And

bitterly did Sparrow regret now that his aunt was no procrastinator and had not put off till to-morrow what she did yesterday. For it was on her postal order for fifteen shillings that Bullock swooped as the hawk swoops upon its quarry. "Now," he said, as he locked it away, "how much more money have you?"

"Not a bean," was the rueful reply.

"Splendid! You always did have too much money to spend; that's *your* trouble, young Sparrow, my son. Otherwise you wouldn't turn up your nose at the grub. But I'll cure you with firmness."

Sparrow kept his stony gaze on the locked drawer.

"I'll take care of this fifteen shillings, my friend. And allow you threepence every Saturday morning." Bullock scribbled on a scrap of paper and tossed it across. "There you are!" he concluded.

Sparrow took it with disgust. "What's this?" he said drearily.

"That's my I O U for fifteen bob!"

"But I'd rather have my postal order."

Bullock's time among the Germs had not been quite wasted. "An I O U," he answered grandly, "is worth its face value all the world over, young Sparrow."

Reflecting that if he had any say in the matter, he would plump every time for "severity" rather than "firmness," the penniless Sparrow was about

to take himself off, when Bullock, who had opened his letter and was glancing at it with a puzzled face, exclaimed: "Half a minute!"

"Yes?" muttered Sparrow, sore without and within.

His keeper detected the note of grievance, and went on to add affability to his recipe. "I thought I didn't recognize the fist at first," he said sociably. "Are you any good, young Sparrow, at deciphering bad writing?"

"No," said Sparrow at once.

"Well, this looks as if a spider had written it with its beak. I'm hanged if I can make out more than a word here and there. Here! You have a shot."

Sparrow ran his eyes down the scented missive. "It's easy enough," he said thoughtfully.

"Then read it out, my son!"

"'My dear cousin Archie,'" read Sparrow.

"My dear cousin Archie," he repeated maliciously.

"All right," growled Bullock.

"'My dear cousin Archie, I am breaking my journey at Castlegate for two hours on Saturday, and I hope you will meet me on the 2.15 cars. This will give me an opportunity of making your acquaintance and of visiting in your society the places of interest in your historic old town. Affectionately, Cousin Laura.'"

"Cousin how much?"

"Cousin Laura," smiled Sparrow.

Bullock fingered his waistcoats and frowned, pondering. "That's my American cousin," he growled at last. "She calls herself Mrs. Sweeten, I believe. She's chinks older than I am, and we've never set eyes on each other. And here she is in England."

"How nice!" observed Sparrow.

"Nice, you little squirt! Saturday's the day of the Garrison match. But a Yankee would never understand a man chucking her for a game." Bullock looked desperate. "I'm hanged if I'll meet her," he roared. "And trot her round my historic old town! Oh, save me!"

"Then write her you're playing——"

"I can't. She would never understand that excuse. She'd cut me out of her will or something of that sort." Calming himself, Cousin Archie began to think. "Look here," he said at last, as his face brightened. "We must dissemble, young Sparrow. We must dissemble. You'll find a post-card on that shelf by the door."

Sparrow gave him the card and he wrote on it carefully.

"There!" he cried, drawing great breaths of relief. "We have dissembled. I've told her I've an exam. on. And so I have," he added, "at the end of term. Now, off you pop, young Sparrow, and post that at once."

And sore without and within still, Sparrow departed.

III

The 2.15 train kept its appointment with Castle-gate to the tick, and a middle-aged lady, richly hatted and furred, advanced with both arms outstretched to the boy on the platform and pressed an effusive kiss upon each of his cheeks. "My dear Archie!" she exclaimed, "I'd have known you anywhere from your photographs when you were quite tiny, you know." Then she held him at arms' length and scanned his features. "Your ears!" she simpered. "What nice ears you have, Archie. I don't mind admitting now that your early photographs made you look as if your ears would grow big. Archie, I hate big ears. I *am* so pleased yours are small."

Having thus unburdened herself without pausing for breath, Mrs. Laura Sweeten beckoned the girl behind her. "Archie, dear, I introduce you to Edith Vansillery. She has popped down with me to see your historic old town. She has only been in England for forty-eight hours."

The boy raised his hat politely and shook hands.

"Now," said Cousin Laura, with a glance at her watch, "we haven't too much time, Archie. What's the first place of interest?" And she turned to inquire if Miss Vansillery had her Guide Book at hand.

Without so much as a glance on either side of him, their guide led the way until they reached a

building whose windows jutted comfortably over the High Street. He entered, and disposing three chairs round a marble-topped table, he rapped and evoked a neat damsel in mob-cap and apron. "Bring a lot!" he said crisply.

"Cousin Laura, this is the oldest confectioner's in the town."

Miss Vansillery, who had been hastily searching her book, was remarking that she could find nothing about it in the Guide, when the return of the waitress arrested her words. Not empty handed had that damsel returned. Perhaps neither Mrs. Sweeten nor her companion had ever seen so many buns on one dish, nor so many varieties of tartlets and sparkling drinks.

"*And* three goes of chicken," the boy added musingly.

Cousin Laura protested that they had lunched in the train. Assured that every tourist who visited Castlegate tasted its staple dish, its celebrated chicken, she removed her gloves and faced the ritual. With the chicken came salad (very curly) and slices of tongue (not tinned) and roast potatoes in their jackets.

"But I don't eat potatoes!" gasped Cousin Laura.

"I'll help you out," said the boy, uncorking a bottle.

The progress of this pleasant repast was punctuated by many a glance from Cousin Laura to her

friend, conveying an injunction to note and admire the healthy appetite of schoolboys in England. After one of these glances, and continuing her thoughts aloud, she remarked that the air of Castlegate must be most bracing! "For I suppose, Archie, you had a good dinner just now at school?"

Her guest looked up from his second helping of chicken. "Oh, no," he sighed. "The grub at the School is awful!"

"Ah," said Cousin Laura, "you surprise me." She pushed her plate on one side. "Well, it's a long time," she said, "since I heard the news of all the family. How is Uncle Tom, Archie?"

"Spiffing!" responded her guest without hesitation.

His cousin looked puzzled. "But they told me," she said at last, "that he'd broken both legs?"

"No, you must be thinking of Uncle Harry. Do have some blancmange."

Cousin Laura looked more puzzled still. "Uncle Harry?" she repeated musingly. And then her face cleared. "That will be," she said tentatively, "your dear mother's brother down in Hampshire, eh, Archie? And how did the poor fellow come to break his legs?"

"Skating," her guest informed her with his mouth full.

Mrs. Sweeten turned to the girl beside her, who was still searching the pages of her Guide Book. "Do you hear, my dear? The weather is so

inclement in some parts of England that they even have skating in July. Our uncle broke his legs in July, I remember."

"I reckon," said Miss Vansillery, "that goes in my diary."

"Edith, you know, is keeping a diary, Cousin Archie. A diary recording her impressions of England."

"This chicken," exclaimed the diarist, "it goes in too!"

Having spent no less than two days in England, Mrs. Sweeten was able to assure her cousin that she had been putting Edith wise about the old country. "On our way down," she explained, "I've told her all about your old institutions, your Houses of Parliament and your coal strikes and your Oxford and Cambridge colleges." Miss Vansillery confirmed with a grateful nod.

"And I have been explaining your wonderful Public School system."

"It must be dandy," agreed Miss Vansillery. The representative of British Public Schools tipped his little cream-jug over his pineapple chunks, and a thoughtful smile stole across his pink-and-white face.

"Ah," he said, under his breath, "whited sepulchres!"

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Vansillery tartly, and wondering if the term was levelled at her.

"Whited sepulchres," repeated their guest,

chasing the last scraps of pineapple round his plate.

Cousin Laura, on whom the observation had been lost, broke into a panegyric of British schools. When she had finished, considerably out of breath, "and isn't that so?" she demanded. "Isn't that so?"

Laying down his spoon and fork with a sigh, the third party to this *al fresco* banquet leaned back, unbuttoned the bottom button of his waistcoat, and regarded them gloomily.

"Our Public School system," said he, very slowly, "is rot."

Had His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury himself appeared and begun to dance upon the table, the two ladies could not have been more astounded. Mrs. Sweeten raised her lorgnettes and stared. Miss Vansillery dropped her book with a cry. Such heresy from such lips was incredible!

The younger lady was the first to recover herself, and, while retrieving her Guide Book from the custard, rejoined that their informant was bluffing them.

"No," said the heretic firmly, "it's tommy rot." He turned a melancholy eye on Cousin Laura. "Look!" he bade. "At my ears!"

"Very nice ears, well shaped," remarked Mrs. Sweeten.

"But do they look bruised?"

"Well, now you point it out——"

"They *are* bruised. Why? Because yesterday I got six clouts on them, just for kicking a chap's heel on the footer field."

"A nasty, horrid game!" exclaimed Edith Vansillery.

"Yes, six clouts. Three on each ear," the sad voice continued, digressing an instant to send the waitress for chocolates. "And that's not the worst of it. The beast took all my pocket-money. Every penny."

"Whatever for?" the ladies ejaculated.

"He said he was beginning a new system of training."

In the expressive eyes of Cousin Laura shone sympathy and holy wrath, nor could she trust herself to speak for a moment.

"Poor Archie!" she murmured at last, her fingers at her purse. "How abominable, Archie! How very abominable!"

"Rotten!" sighed the penniless heretic.

Slipping a handful of silver across the table, Cousin Laura inquired the name of the bully. Her guest, having thanked her and put the money in his pocket, assumed a martyred expression and murmured something about suffering in silence.

"He won't tell tales," whispered Edith Vansillery.

Cousin Laura drew herself up. "I insist," she rejoined.

And under pressure the martyr's fortitude broke.

"It was," he murmured, "a great big beast called Sparrow."

The ladies caught up the name with angry emphasis. "So a boy called Sparrow robbed you!" cried Cousin Laura. "And Sparrow banged your ears!" added Miss Vansillery.

"Yes, a great big bully called Sparrow," came the sad murmur.

In the interest, historic or otherwise, of this fraction of Castlegate, the tourists had forgotten how time flies; and now they discovered that they had only half an hour to their train. However, this was ample to qualify them for describing, when back in the States, the City of Castlegate; and after their conductor had seen them off he felt that he had never been so run off his legs. So he took things very leisurely on his way back.

He had barely turned into the avenue than he espied the form of Willett, prancing to meet him. He knew exactly what Willett was about to remark.

"Sparrow! I say, Sparrow? Lend a chap tuppence?"

Sparrow stopped and eyed his friend searchingly. "Do you know, Willett?" he asked, "what an I O U is?"

"Rath-er!" responded the expert on economics.

"Very well. I'll lend you five bob, Willett——"

Willett began to tremble. "Don't rot!" he implored.

"—if you'll give me your I O U for it, Willett.

And also for the four and tuppence ha'p'ny you owe me already."

"Fork out!" exclaimed Willett.

"Your I O U first. For nine shillings and tuppence ha'p'ny altogether."

The transaction being completed on the spot, Willett described a bee-line to the tuck shop. Proceeding, Sparrow encountered Bullock in the Quad. His keeper had scored two tries, and was in high feather.

"Halloa, young Sparrow!" he cried. "A rare good game, wasn't it!"

"Very," assented Sparrow, returning his smile.

IV

On weekdays Mr. Eggett presided at dinner, but on Sundays the Head made a point of dining in Hall. To-day as he took his place he seemed preoccupied, contributing little save monosyllables to the conversation.

Mr. Eggett, on his right hand, was glad to sit silently, because, unhappily, his indigestion had returned with reinforcements; and the joint of roast pork was odious in his eyes. And doing his best to keep them from his plate, he let them stray in relief around Bullock's neighbourhood, which that worthy was keeping in lively amusement. As it happened, he was entertaining them with a description of his new method with Sparrow.

"F. and S., my bonny boys!" he kept saying. "That's the stuff to give Sparrow!"

"It sounds all right," declared Palethorpe. "What is F. and S.?"

"Firmness and severity," answered Bullock.

They were interrupted by the rasp of the Head's chair as he thrust it back. Grace was said. And then the Head raised his hand and bade them remain.

"I've just a word or two to say to you, lads. I want you to know, that I'll have no bullying in the School."

They glanced at one another. Who had been bullying?

"But so much understood, there's another thing. I will not have boys complaining and stating untruths." Mr. Games paused to draw a letter from his pocket. "Now you would not conceive," he went on slowly, "that any boy here would complain about our food. We have just enjoyed some excellent roasted pork"—here Mr. Eggett winced and suppressed a groan—"nor would you credit it, boys, that one of your number would complain of being bullied and of having his money taken from him!"

A second time he paused to mark the effect. He saw his audience staring; he heard them whisper; incredulously asking who it could be? Then he turned to Mr. Eggett.

"Would *you*, Mr. Eggett?"

Mr. Eggett returned a horrified, "Never!"

"And, Mr. Eggett, a boy in the School Fifteen!"

It was as if the War had come back on the spot and a Zeppelin had dropped its bombs in their midst. To hear that a man in the Fifteen had groused of being bullied! And had had his money taken from him! And had written home, whining!

Indignantly every eye searched the Fifteen.

"But it is so," said the Head in disgusted tones. "This morning I have received a letter from a relative of one of our football team, and she tells me that this boy complains of three things. First, that our food is awful—mark his word, boys! Next, that for kicking another fellow at football he was hit six times upon the head. And, thirdly, that his money was taken from him. . . . Boys, could you have believed this? Mr. Eggett, could you?"

"Abominable!" Mr. Eggett exclaimed hoarsely.

"And who do you think," the Head went on remorselessly, "this poor boy is, who has been so ill-used? Who is our poor little fellow who whines and complains so? Who can't look after his own money! Who is he?"

The Head surveyed them an instant.

"Bullock," he thundered. "Come up!"

The massive figure of Sparrow's keeper arose, and, its ears looking larger than ever, stumbled heavily forward. Like a man dazed, it halted before the high table.

“ Bullock, I have here a letter from your cousin. ‘ Poor Archie was hit six times on his poor little ears,’ she writes, ‘ because he happened to kick a fellow at football. And the bully who bruised his ears took all Archie’s money. So I gave him twenty shillings to spend on food.’ ” The Head tossed the letter aside. “ Boys ! Our poor little Archie ! ”

Bullock stood stupefied, his thoughts whirling. He had never seen his cousin. That he did know. He must be dreaming it all.

He stammered and stuttered, but his tongue refused to act and his face was scarlet. The picture of guilty confusion, if ever there was one, he stood and fumbled helplessly with his waistcoats.

And all the time the Head’s scornful gaze enveloped him.

Mr. Games was obliged to rap on the table to recall their eyes from the great stricken figure to himself.

“ And who do you think,” he went on steadily, “ is the boy who clouted Bullock on the ears, and who took our poor whining Bullock’s money away ? Who is the bully who has bullied our whimpering Bullock ? The monstrous bully ! Stand out that boy ! ”

This time every eye sought the seats of the mighty, for who could bully Bullock but one of the bucks ? Yet no one stirred in those seats. The silence was awful.

“Stand out!” the Head thundered.

Not a soul moved.

“Very well. I must name the lad who has bullied poor Bullock, and who took poor little Bullock’s money away.”

Not a rustle responded.

“Sparrow! Stand out!”

And the victim of Firmness and Severity rose and joined his keeper.

In the sanctuary of Mr. Eggett’s study, and before Mr. Eggett himself passed any remarks, Bullock demanded his cousin’s twenty shillings.

A gentle smile illumined Sparrow’s face. “Of course, I was going to tell you, Bullock,” he said. He searched his pockets, and produced a scrap of paper. “Here’s nine and tuppence ha’p’ny of it,”—he bowed and handed Bullock the crumpled paper—“and here,” producing another scrap, “is fifteen shillings. So all you owe me now, Bullock, is four and tuppence ha’p’ny.”

With a snort of disgust, Bullock tossed the papers aside. “My money!” he roared.

Sparrow’s answer was polite but firm. “You’ve got it, Bullock. I have given you Willett’s I O U for nine and tuppence ha’p’ny; and your own I O U. And an I O U, as you assured me, is worth its face value all the world over, Bullock.”

Mr. Eggett deemed it time to interpose. “Sparrow,” he remarked, with his wry smile, “do you

know that suppression of letters is a grave offence? ”

“ Sir,” corrected Sparrow, “ it was a post-card. And I posted it last night, sir, when I got back.”

“ And impersonation is also a serious offence.”

“ Very, sir,” agreed Sparrow.

“ Then, Sparrow, what have you got to say for yourself? ”

“ I think, sir,” Sparrow answered eagerly, “ that a boy who does those things ought to be ex——”

“ Ah, caned,” Mr. Eggett cut in. “ I quite agree, Sparrow.”

And, drawing a sigh, he selected his most supple cane.

Chapter VII Sparrow Becomes a Landed Proprietor

IF Bullock had any weak point (which is much to be debated) it was his fondness for talking about his great expectations. He possessed, it appeared, an old bachelor uncle, a recluse, a man of some mystery, who had always promised that when some day or other he died he intended to leave Bullock something big in his will.

“ Big ! ” Bullock would reiterate. “ Something ‘ really big ’—those were his words. Something really big. What do you fellows reckon? ”

“ A cool fifty thousand,” Palethorpe would always assure him.

"Fifty thousand, eh?"

"Not a penny less," Palethorpe asseverated.

So this pretty little sum had generally come to be named as the figure, cool or not cool, which Bullock might expect from his uncle. And presently he had news that the old man had died. And next that he'd kept his word and left him a legacy.

"Something big," Bullock went about reminding his friends. "I don't know how much yet. But my uncle's words always were—'something big, my dear Archie!'"

The old gentleman kept his word right up to the hilt.

He left Bullock a mountain.

A mountain is a delectable thing to have. But Bullock had no idea what to do with his. As he growled to the senior day-room, "What's the good of it? I can't go climbing up and down it all day!"

Palethorpe said, "I say? Are there sheep upon it?"

"Sheep! Why should there be sheep on the rotten thing?"

"Oh, I don't know. But sheep do hang about upon mountains."

"And game! And deer and things!" contributed Sparrow.

"I guess there aren't any sheep or trimmings on mine!"

“ But where is it, Bullock ? ”

The legatee hesitated. “ I tell you I don't know, Palethorpe. All I've heard so far is that it's a measly old mountain.”

“ But surely you've got some idea where it is ? ”

“ It's in Wales,” grunted Bullock.

“ But whereabouts in Wales ? ” persisted Palethorpe.

“ It's near Llanfarrfywgllrnllymgoch,” Bullock owned modestly.

II

So Bullock took thought and determined to raffle his mountain. It seemed rather a sporty idea to raffle a mountain. And, besides, he was stony and wanted the money badly. And what was the good of a mountain to him anyhow; especially one so far off as Llanfarrfywgllrnllymgoch? He felt sure that every chap in the School would go in for it, for the tickets were jolly cheap at a bob a nob ; and it isn't every day in the week, as he told them, that you get the chance of buying a mountain for a bob !

Naturally some of the fellows took several tickets (Palethorpe took eighteen on the chance of the sheep) and the draw was made by a small Committee of three, Bullock himself presiding, with Palethorpe as puller-out-of-the-hat. It was made in the senior day-room one night before Prep.

Some persons are proverbially lucky in sweep-

stakes. You can back them to draw a prize whenever they enter. And Sparrow must have been born with this unnatural gift, for although he had only gone halves in one ticket with Willett, not only did his name come out of the hat, but when he tossed Willett he called "Heads!" and "Heads" it came down. So there was Sparrow, entirely pleased with himself, the possessor of Bullock's mountain; a landed proprietor.

"Old man," inquired Willett, "what will you do with it?"

"I don't know," said Sparrow.

"Well, why not lend it a chap?" said Willett pleasantly.

"Lend you my mountain? Certainly not," said Sparrow.

Willett became insistent. Although, as he pointed out, he had lost the toss, he retained a say in it still, and he urged very strongly that they should wait till the holidays to explore it, when they could get their photographs on the back page of the *Mail*. "*Messrs. Willett and Sparrow, two intrepid climbers of Castlegate School, exploring the mountain which they have recently acquired.*"

"That," declared Willett, "will look thundering well in the *Mail*. And in *The Times*, too, I guess. I vote for that, Sparrow."

"I don't," observed Sparrow.

"Well, you can't do anything with it unless I agree."

"Oh, can't I?" said Sparrow.

"No. Because tossing's illegal. My father's a solicitor and I'm jolly sure if I went to law I should win. An illegal consideration the lawyers would call it. So you'd have to give it me back; I mean, my half, Sparrow."

"You're a fat ass," said Sparrow.

"I'm not. Our mountain is either all yours or all mine."

"It isn't *our* mountain. You jolly well know I won your half."

"But tossing's illegal. So it's all mine. For *you* broke the law."

This troubled Sparrow. He'd certainly got a mountain, but now he wasn't sure it was really his. Nor did he know a bit what to do with it. But in this dilemma he thought of a fountain of wisdom, and, keeping his own counsel, he went very quietly to sound Mr. Eggett on the subject of mountains.

"Sir," he began, "supposing that you had a mountain?"

Mr. Eggett paused in the act of measuring his medicine, and setting the bottle down, ejaculated:

"I had WHAT?"

"A mountain, sir," murmured Sparrow. "Supposing you won one——"

"My poor lad! Have you sunstroke?" sighed Mr. Eggett.

Sparrow levelled a kindly glance on the medicine,

which was of a colour he had never seen here before. "It's pink, sir!" he said. "You generally swig green stuff or brown stuff."

"A new preparation, Sparrow. An infallible cure." The sufferer picked up the bottle and studied the label. "But, unhappily, it doesn't appear to be recommended for sunstroke. And that's odd, too. For it seems to cure everything else."

"But, sir, I haven't got sunstroke. If you had a mountain, with sheep and stags on it——"

"And snow on the peaks?" Mr. Eggett put in very gently.

"Yes, I expect so, sir. A regular mountain."

"And grouse and pheasants flying about, I suppose?"

Sparrow cogitated. "I don't see why not, sir. But supposing, sir, that you'd got a jolly old mountain, what would you do with it, sir? No, honestly, sir?"

"Are you—er—pulling your work together at all, Sparrow?"

"I am, sir," said Sparrow.

"Ah, I feared so. You have been overworking yourself. You had better ask the Matron to see to your sunstroke, and take my advice and don't worry your head about mountains."

But Sparrow meant to get some suggestion ere he went. "Sir," he answered without budging, "really, I'm not rotting——"

"I trust not," Mr. Eggett put in with a slight shiver.

"So, honestly, sir? Supposing you'd won a mountain?"

"I refuse to suppose so," was the resolute answer.

"Well, then, sir, suppose it was just a small hill. You might easily win a small hill, mightn't you, sir?"

Mr. Eggett shrugged his sparse shoulders. "In *my* running days, Sparrow, I cannot recollect that I won many, or—er—any prizes, save once, when I came in third in the Consolation Race. But throwing my memory back, I do not recall that they gave away hills, or mountains, as prizes in my days. However, to humour you, we'll suppose that they did——"

"And that you'd won the Mile, sir," Sparrow seconded earnestly.

"No, the Three Miles," smiled Mr. Eggett, "while we're about it. We'll suppose I'd won the Three Miles and they'd given me a small hill. Very well, Sparrow. What is the rest of the puzzle?"

"Sir," said Sparrow swiftly, "what would you do with it?"

"Well, that would depend a good deal where it was, wouldn't it?"

"Would it, sir? I shouldn't have thought that mattered."

“ Obviously. For example, if I’d won a small hill in Honolulu——”

“ But suppose it wasn’t so far away as that, sir ? ”

“ Well, where would you like it to be, for the sake of our riddle ? ”

Sparrow got his mouth into trim. “ Llanfarr-fywglrnllymgoch, sir.”

“ Say that again, please,” Mr. Eggett entreated.

“ I can’t, sir. I can only say it once in a day. But anyhow, sir, supposing your mountain was there, sir ? ”

“ Then,” Mr. Eggett said gravely, “ it could stay there. Honestly—to adopt your eloquent term, Sparrow—I should not cart my mountain about. I should leave it there. And now run off and get your sunstroke attended to.”

“ But, sir——”

“ Be off with you ! ” Mr. Eggett said with a snap.

So Sparrow went, considerably disappointed ; for he had been building upon the sage advice of his friend. And the more he thought of his mountain the more it troubled him. “ Willett,” he remarked to that youth in the morning, “ there’s only one thing to do. That’s to raffle it again.”

“ Or lend it to a chap,” said Willett persuasively.

“ Perhaps,” said Sparrow, seemingly deaf, “ we might advertise it ? ”

“ What ? Advertise that we’ve got a mountain for sale ? ”

“ No. Advertise that *I* have,” said Sparrow firmly.

But circumstances were already hastening to aid him.

For the next day, being Sunday, there came to the School Chapel a preacher of great eloquence and persuasiveness. He was there to plead the cause of a noble Charity, and he painted most arresting and moving word pictures; and as he ended and leaned well over the pulpit he urged his congregation to *Give—give—give!*

And each time that this earnest plea left his lips, his eyes were guided by Fate to rest upon Sparrow's, who eyed him back with the most unflinching regard.

"Give! Give! Give!" The preacher ceased. The preacher announced the hymn. The monitors moved noiselessly for the collection plates.

What could Sparrow give? He felt through his pockets. There was only one halfpenny; for Willett had borrowed the rest. A ha'p'ny! What was that for so worthy a Cause? His generous, throbbing heart blushed for shame at the thought.

And the plate was approaching him. O horrible moment!

Then did he draw forth a pencil and envelope, and, after one swift lick of the pencil's point, he scribbled:

I give one mountain. Sparrow, T. W. S.

Sparrow had put his mountain into the plate.

III

He went out of Chapel in a glow. Willett could threaten what he liked, but he couldn't get the mountain back from the Charity, nor bring a law-suit against them for tossing for it. Willett's father might be a clever solicitor, but he wasn't clever enough, not by chalks, for that! And also Sparrow went out in a thrill of benevolence, exceeding the joy he'd felt when he'd won the raffle. Topping as it might be to win a mountain, it was very much more topping to give one away!

"No one," mused he, "can ever call me a miser."

He rather wanted to go off as fast as he could and tell Mr. Eggett what he had done with his mountain. At dinner-time, when Willett whispered, "Look here! I'll tell you what we'll do with that mountain of ours," he passed his plate up hurriedly for more pudding, and devoured it without lifting his head from the task. And the moment dinner was over, off he rushed, to share his quite interesting secret with the Old Egg.

But he never got so far as that patient dyspeptic, because he was intercepted on the way and informed that the Head required his presence instant.

He had certainly expected the Head to send for him, to thank him for his benevolence; but not quite so soon. "This," said Sparrow, "is very brisk business indeed. Jolly decent of the old man to thank me so quickly!"

And as he tapped at the door, " Really decent, I call it."

He found Mr. Games looking hot and considerably upset ; whatever he might be feeling, he didn't *look* grateful. Nor was his greeting of the sort that fosters illusions.

" Sparrow," he rapped, " you came here to play the fool ! "

" Sir," assented Sparrow, " I'd be better at home."

" Very likely. And unless you're careful, my man, you'll find yourself going home for good one fine morning."

Sparrow's mild eye brightened. " Please, when, sir ? " he cried.

" Don't talk foolishness. Beware how you answer me back. And now—how do you explain your behaviour in Chapel ? "

" In Chapel, sir ? When, sir ? Please ? " said Sparrow, astonished.

" This morning, Sparrow. Quick ! What's your explanation ? "

" Sir, I behaved all right," said Sparrow regretfully, filing for future reference, so to speak, a memo. that talking in Chapel might procure him expulsion.

" I mean your conduct after the sermon, Sparrow."

" Yes, sir. I went out with the others, sir."

" And what did you leave behind you ? Answer me that ! "

"A mountain, sir," said Sparrow, very politely.

"Ah, now we're coming to it. You—er—gave a mountain!"

"Please, sir, I wanted to give it. I'd only a ha'p'ny."

The Head looked him up and down with a sorrowing glance; a searching, measuring, probing, reflective glance. His voice grew softer. "I suppose, my poor lad," he replied, smoothing out and extending the crumpled envelope, "that this is your writing; there's no mistake?"

"None at all, sir," said Sparrow.

"Ah! Possibly the sermon was too much for you. Are you imaginative, impressionable, Sparrow? Easily wrought upon?"

"Yes, sir. That's why a school isn't good for me," Sparrow cried eagerly.

"Does your head pain you ever?"

"But sir," insisted Sparrow, "I *have* got a mountain."

"Oh, you have got a mountain, have you?" the Head agreed soothingly.

"I mean, I had one, sir. I haven't now."

"Oh, you had a mountain, had you?" the Head repeated.

"Yes, sir. But now the Charity's got it, sir. You see I thought they'd find it a bit useful, sir."

The Head was slowly tearing the envelope to pieces. "My poor Sparrow," he sighed, "I am ready to take your word for it. If you say you've

got a mountain, no doubt you have one. But I can't let my boys put mountains into the plate. So we'll forget all about it."

"If I wasn't at School, sir, they'd let me do what I liked with it."

"Well, tell me, Sparrow. Where is this mountain of yours?"

"Please, sir," said Sparrow, preparing his mouth, "it's in Wales."

"Yes, I rather believe there are lots of mountains in Wales. I suppose the name of yours isn't Snowdon, Sparrow?"

"No, sir," said Sparrow. "At least, it doesn't *sound* that way."

"Not Snowdon, eh? Well, what type of mountain is it?"

"I don't know, sir. I only know it's a mountain."

"But that's astonishing. You own a mountain, but you can't tell me which of the four types it is. Come, think again, Sparrow. There are four main types of mountains. We have the volcanic type——"

Sparrow raised finger and thumb. "Number one, sir," he said.

"The denudation type——"

"Denudation," said Sparrow.

"The outlier type——"

"Outlier. Three, sir," said Sparrow.

"And the tectonic type. Now, which type is yours?"

"Please, sir, mine's got sheep on it!" Sparrow cried desperately.

"Oh, very well," the Head snapped. "Then perhaps you know where it is? Whereabouts is it?"

"I've said, sir. In Wales."

"Whereabouts in Wales. Don't fence with me, lad!"

"Quite close to Llanfarrfywgllrnllymgoch, sir," said Sparrow.

The Head winced sharply. "Run away," he commanded. "And be thankful that I'm letting you off this time. Next time you want to play a joke with the plate I recommend you to wait till the holidays."

"Yes, sir," Sparrow assented, and beat his retreat.

His mountain had recoiled on his own head, and come back to him like a boomerang—hang his mountain! So when Bullock came to him furtively after tea, and began to hum and haw, betraying his mind, Sparrow listened to him with mingled feelings in which a certain sense of relief was predominating. If Bullock wanted his mountain back he should have it; but Bullock needn't guess that he felt like that.

"Then," he said, when Bullock had been talking for twenty good minutes, "what you're driving at is this—you want it back?"

"Young Spadger," Bullock said gruffly, "it's no good to you."

"That's all very well, Bullock. But why should I give you it. You're not a good Cause; the preacher wasn't preaching about you."

"I don't know what you're bleating about," answered Bullock.

"No, you wouldn't," said Sparrow, who'd kept his own secret, and now was determined to keep it closer than ever. "Never mind, Bullock. But it isn't mine to give, really."

"But you won it!" Bullock grumbled, lifting his eyebrows.

"Yes. But half the ticket belonged to Willett."

"But you and Willett tossed which should have the lot!"

"So we did toss. But Willett says that's illegal. His father's going to sue me for his half-share."

"For his half-share?"

"Yes. You know—for the sheep half."

"I'll jolly well scrag——"

"But that wouldn't do any good. If you scrag his father's neck I expect he's got partners, and you can't go round throttling all the solicitors in London."

"The sheep half!" Bullock echoed. "There aren't any sheep on it."

Sparrow's finger went to his lip. "H'sh!" he urged earnestly. "You swore when you raffled it there were sheep on it, and if Willett hears that there aren't, his father will sue *you*."

He's bound to, Bullock. For raffling something that wasn't. Getting money under false pretences, that's what they call it."

"I never said there were sheep!"

"And stags and pheasants. You know you did, Bullock. And as Willett's father's bagging the sheep and stags, how can I give the mountain back to you, Bullock?"

Bullock's jaw had dropped. "But I must get it back," he groaned. "I don't want any frantic lawsuits and things."

"No," said Sparrow gently, "of course you don't, Bullock. A lawsuit would be beastly, wouldn't it, Bullock? You'd have to go in the box and everything you said would be used in evidence against you, Bullock." He thought a moment. "I'll tell you what, Bullock," he murmured. "I won that mountain fairly and squarely in your raffle, and if you want it back you must buy it back."

"But what about Willett's father?" Bullock was spluttering.

"Well, I'll promise to do all I can with him. I think I can square it if you leave it to me."

"Then you'll sell it me?"

"Yes, I will. How much will you give?"

"Well, it's no good to you. It ought to go cheap."

"Yes, Bullock. That's why you raffled it for such a fat lot. I tell you what. I'll swop it for your motor-bike."

"My motor-bike! Phew! Easy on!" exclaimed Bullock.

"Well, a jolly young mountain's worth more than a mouldy old bike."

"And you'll square Willett?"

Sparrow nodded. "Is that a swop?"

"It's a swop," agreed Bullock.

Then Sparrow inquired what he meant to do with his mountain now that he had managed to get it back; and Bullock, scowling furiously, shook his head.

"I've no idea," he admitted.

"But first you raffle it! Then you buy it back!"

"Young Spadger," the legatee groaned, "can't you see my fix. If it ever got out that I'd raffled it I guess no other relations would leave me a penny. And I've got a lot of uncles and aunts training on. So you see I absolutely daren't leave it raffled. I had to have it back. And now, here we are!"

"Well," said Sparrow, eyeing him very gently, "if I were you, Bullock, I'd do something noble with it."

"Noble!"

"Yes, noble. Your uncles and aunts training on would be awfully bucked if you'd done something noble with that legacy. They'd twig at once what a fine, generous soul you were——"

Bullock looked dubious. "Would they?" he said suspiciously.

"And they'd put you down for pots and pots in their wills." Sparrow's eyes took a faraway look, and his voice grew more earnest. "A great, noble, generous action. That's the stunt, Bullock."

"But they'd guess the measly old thing was no good to me!"

"Of course they wouldn't. Every one's keen on mountains. They'd think you were wonderful. I know they would, Bullock."

"Oh," said Bullock sourly, "so that's what you think. Well, now and then, young Spadger, you do get a notion. What's the noble thing I can do with it?"

Sparrow looked to right and left in a cautious manner; then, clasping Bullock's fat neck, he drew down his head. Then he whispered. And while he listened Bullock's small eyes were twinkling.

"Young Spadger," he said wheezily, "you're a genius."

"You'll do it, then?"

"You bet your boots I will."

"Yes," admitted Sparrow, "I *do* get ideas."

And that night he tossed Willett for the motor-bicycle. And won it.

IV

As most people know, the Governing Body of Castlegate have a pleasant office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, whither their Secretary repairs every morning to peruse the letters which the clerk has opened

all ready for him. On the morning at which this history has arrived, the Secretary drew a little sigh of relief to observe that there was merely one solitary letter awaiting his attention on the big table. He drew out his massive chair, finely carved in old oak, settled his spectacles, and proceeded to read :

To the Governors
of Castlegate School.

DEAR SIRS (or gentlemen),—

Now and then when I'm reading the newspapers I spot that somebody has died and left something to the School, which, allow me to say, you govern so admirably.

This is very generous of them of course.

In fact jolly decent and I've always thought that we ought to have a whole holiday to celebrate. I expect you'll ask the Headmaster to do that in future. I mean to give us a holiday when they die off.

But what I want to say is why wait till you're dead? I don't mean, dear sirs, wait till you're dead yourselves, but why don't people give things before they croak? I expect you know why but I don't, excuse this long letter.

So I'm jolly well going to start a much better stunt and give things to the School before I die, like you give testimonials while you're alive, you

know. The proverb says that a living lion's better than a dead horse and anyhow it would fetch more for a menagerie. Of course I know that you can sell horses' skins and things and their hoofs, or hooves is the way to spell it, to make glue of and you stuff cushions with horsehair jolly hard for the nut, excuse this long letter.

So as a mark of my appreciation and esteem please accept a mountain with the compliments of yours frightfully sincerely.

ARCHIBALD BULLOCK.

(Number 187, Castlegate School).

P.S. Of course lions' skins are all right to make rugs with and nobody has ever seen a dead donkey, I expect that's why the proverb says horse instead.

The Secretary was a wise man. Having read this modest epistle more than once, and summoned his clerk to check that the envelope did undoubtedly bear the postmark proper for the School, he decided to defer breaking the entrancing news to the Governors until he had communicated with the Head. The terms of his letter to Mr. Games have not been revealed, but their sequel was a summons for Bullock to the presence. And the Head wasn't smiling at all when Bullock appeared.

"So you," he thundered, "are also seeking for trouble, Bullock!"

Bullock marked the "also"; and wondered what it meant. Finding no apt rejoinder, he gave a glum stare.

"Don't look so vacuous, Bullock. Is this an epidemic?"

"Yes, sir," growled Bullock, remembering he'd had the measles.

"It is an epidemic?" the Head exclaimed fiercely.

Bullock grunted, and saw that he'd made a bad shot. "No, it isn't, sir," he made haste to correct himself.

"Do you know what I'm talking about?" rapped Mr. Games.

"No, I don't, sir," owned Bullock.

"This letter! This impertinent letter you've written. This mad, ridiculous, deplorable letter about horse hooves! How dare you write it, Bullock! How dare you, I say!"

"Please, sir, I was—er—helped with it," Bullock faltered.

"Who helped you, Bullock? Stay! Don't answer. I won't ask. But if it was the boy whom I have in mind I shall ask Mr. Eggett to deal with him very severely."

"It wasn't, sir," growled Bullock, staunchly enough. "Palethorpe never knew——"

"Pish! Palethorpe indeed! I am not thinking of Palethorpe. But let that pass for the moment. Whatever do you mean by offering the

Governors such insolence? Studied insolence, Bullock! Amazing impertinence!"

Bullock's knees were shaking. "Nothing," he mumbled.

"Oh! And you are the boy who is giving mountains away?"

"No, sir! Only one, sir," Bullock cried earnestly.

"And where is this mountain you're giving?"

"Near Llanfarrfywgllynllymgoch!" gulped Bullock.

The Head dropped back despairingly in his chair. "The last time that I heard of that mountain," he gasped, "it belonged, or so I was led to believe, to Sparrow."

"It did, sir," moaned Bullock.

"And now you come and say it belongs to you! You have the nerve to come to me with a story like that!"

"You sent for me, sir," said Bullock in a grieved voice.

"For writing reams of impertinence——"

"It does belong to me, sir. My uncle left it, and I let Sparrow have it, and then bought it back. And now it's mine I'm giving it to the School, sir, but I'm not going to swear that it's got sheep on it, sir, or stags, sir——"

"Oh, cease!" the Head exclaimed with a thump on his desk. "And what do your parents say to you giving it away?"

"I haven't told them, sir. I thought you'd do

that. Or I can when the Governors write and thank me." Bullock was now talking for all he was worth ; to drench, as it were, the flames of the Head's annoyance. " Of course, sir, if there were sheep we could kill them for mutton, which would save the School a lot on its bill for grub, sir. At least, that was Sparr—, I mean another man's idea, sir ; and he said that stags would be grub, too, if we made venison——"

" Be quiet ! " shouted the Head ; then eyed Bullock sternly till presently suspicion fled from his face. " Bullock, you are much too wooden in the head to try and play an elaborate joke on the School. So as I give you the credit of meaning well, I shall recommend that your unusual gift be accepted. If your parents are agreeable ; that's understood. And as you wish it, I will write myself to your parents. It is generous of you, Bullock ; very generous."

" Yes, sir," said Bullock. " Can I have an extra week's holiday ? "

" Certainly not," said the Head. " That is all. You can go."

But a day or two later he was summoned again, to be told that his father marked with singular pleasure this dawn of generosity in his son's mind, and, feeling loth to nip such good impulses in the bud, assented to the transfer of the bequest. Mr. Bullock added that he lacked full particulars, so referred Mr. Games to the executors of the will

for the completion of the necessary formalities.

"So I am writing to them to-day," the Head ended briskly.

"Yes, sir," said Bullock. "Can I have three days' holiday?"

"You may not," said the Head.

He heard next from the solicitors, who averred the esteem in which they held his communication and begged permission to acknowledge its arrival. He visioned them on their knees with this supplication. They added that his instructions would have attention, and that they would write again with further details. So reflecting that the matter was now in order, and that, after all, he had been somewhat stiff with Bullock, the Head determined to make the *amende honorable* by thanking that generous soul in front of the School.

"Boys," he remarked, as they sat before him like statues, "I have to announce to you something remarkably pleasing. It is not often that a boy while still at school is able to present us with a substantial token of his—er—zeal. A substantial token. Something big."

Bullock was biting his nails and glowering at Sparrow.

"Indeed," the Head went on, as he warmed to his theme, "it is not often that we number boys who are landowners. Or, should I say, mountain-owners?"

Mr. Eggett, who had been reflecting upon his

dyspepsia and the failure of his new medicine to live up to its label, here raised his head with a jerk and looked round for Sparrow ; then pricked his ears to lose no word of the rest.

“ As I was saying, all of us are not mountain-owners. But one of us, who is, sets a fine example by—er—donating his mountain in trust for the School.” The Head turned to his second-in-command. “ Perhaps, Mr. Eggett, you would like to organize parties to scale our mountain ? ”

“ I should not, sir,” Mr. Eggett said stonily.

“ Well, well. I am confident that the School will reap benefit from it ; though the Governors must decide what to do with it.” The Head paused for an instant. “ Archibald Bullock, stand up ! ”

Red and wretched, Bullock arose. He had not bargained for this.

“ Boys, behold the generous donor of our mountain ! ”

The generous donor glowered into their faces.

“ And tell me,” the Head went on in his artless style, “ what is the name, my lad, of our charming mountain ? ”

No answer from Bullock.

“ Tut ! Find your tongue, my friend. What’s the name of our mountain ? ”

Up went Willett’s hand. “ Sir ! I know where it’s near, sir ! ”

“ Oh, do you, Willett ? ” the Head rejoined with austerity.

"Yes, sir. It's——"

"Be quiet, Willett. Now, Bullock, we're waiting for you?"

"It's near Llanfarrfywgllrnllymgoch," growled the philanthropist.

"Splendid! That's the very place for a mountain. You agree, Eggett?"

Mr. Eggett fingered his beard. "Well once, sir," he answered, "I dreamed, I fancy, that I'd won a mountain near that place."

Then the Head discarded his tone of banter. "Bullock," he said seriously, "we do thank you really; and I think you've done a fine thing. Boys, three cheers for Bullock!"

As they were given at the top of three hundred voices they drowned the philanthropist's request for a holiday.

But this was the beginning of Bullock's fame. Modestly as he was trying to bear himself, it was impossible to get away from his glorious beneficence. In the very next number of the School magazine his photograph appeared with a sparkling article (submitted in typescript by an anonymous correspondent) which related the story of his exceptional gift and dilated upon the wild sheep that gambolled upon it. Had Sparrow been able to draw, we may hazard a guess that the article would have been suitably illustrated, with pictures of these sheep, and the deer and grouse, and the bison which Palethorpe had added by now to the

rest. There would have been snow, too, upon the crest. And climbers with alpenstocks.

Beneath the photograph in the magazine this pleasant and arresting inscription appeared :—

ARCHIBALD BULLOCK.

THE MAN WHO GAVE US A MOUNTAIN.

It wouldn't have been so bad had it ended there. But this being plumb in the middle of the season, parents and friends used to arrive to watch the home matches, and fellows who were big enough to know better would rush from all parts of the ground to point Bullock out.

"That's Bullock!" he would hear them whisper excitedly. "That's Bullock! That fat goat! The ass who gave us a mountain!"

Sparrow and Willett spent delightful hours at this game. And presently when it grew to a competition (moulded somewhat on the lines of the Beaver game) Sparrow held the record (or claims that he did) by exhibiting Bullock to different sightseers no less than forty-three times on the same afternoon.

So distressfully did the donor begin to deplore that ever he had listened to Sparrow's advice; more and more he wished that he'd never been left a mountain; and on every match day he wished that he'd never been born before he'd thought of presenting it to the School. He might have known . . . he might have known, he lamented

. . . he should have guessed what a fatal idiot he'd look !

And then, one drizzling afternoon, there came shouts down the corridor and voices calling his name in many bright keys. He was told that once again the Head wanted him, and he dragged a crushed and heavy way to the study. Mr. Games gave him a curt nod, and a letter to read.

It was exquisitely typed, and addressed to the Head by the solicitors in charge of his uncle's estate.

"DEAR SIR,

"In re Theophilus Bullock, deceased.

"Further to our letter of the 4th ulto, we are now in position to complete the bequest concerned.

"Possibly we should state for your information that the affairs of our late client were considerably involved ; so that we have been put to some time and trouble in tracing his commitments and bequests. We have succeeded at last, however, in identifying the bequest to his nephew, Archibald Bullock, and we have pleasure in despatching it to you under separate cover. . . ."

"My hat !" Bullock gasped.

Then he threw a blank stare at the Head. "Read on !" bade the latter.

"The mountain in question is a small water-colour of a hill or mountain near Llanfarrfywgllrn-

llymgoch (which, we may add for your information, is in Wales). We understand from the butler of the deceased that the deceased always referred to this picture as 'my mountain,' and added that it was put down in his will to his nephew. This is clearly indicated, then, as the legacy you name ; and we shall be obliged in due course for the receipt of your Board of Governors on the enclosed form.

"Perhaps you will kindly obtain this receipt for us."

"*Post Scriptum.* In any event, we have to make clear to you that this is the only mountain our client possessed."

When Bullock passed the letter back, the Head laughed.

"I shall hang our mountain in the library," smiled he.

"So Sparrow," Mr. Eggett was saying that evening, "you persuaded Bullock into writing that nonsense to the Governors?"

"Sir, I composed his letter," said Sparrow proudly.

"Oh, you did ; did you. And did *you* suggest the idea?"

"I did, sir," said Sparrow.

"And may I ask why?" Mr. Eggett said, eyeing his medicine.

"Sir," said Sparrow, whose face had fallen, "it was a frost. I had given the mountain to the Collection, sir, but the Head wouldn't have it and seemed rather peeved about it. He hinted that if I played the fool any more he'd expel me. So that gave me the notion, sir, of getting Bullock to write to the Governors and give the jolly old hill away to the School." Sparrow's voice was wistful now. "But it didn't act, sir!"

"Act! However did you think it would act?"

"I thought the Head would be awfully furious, sir, first with the letter, sir; and then with Bullock's sort of cheek, sir. When the Head taxed Bullock, I thought Bullock was sure to confess that I'd put him up to the dodge and that I'd written the letter. And then, sir, I felt that the Head would say—'Sparrow, depart!'"

"Ah," murmured Mr. Eggett with a queer smile. "Well, you see, one can never be sure how things will turn out." He glanced at the corner in which his cane lingered coyly. "Ah, well. Good night, Sparrow."

"Good night, sir," answered Sparrow in mournful tones.

Chapter VIII

Put and Take

"**A** BOB, please!" Sparrow remarked icily. Willett's reply was a groan. "What bob?" he protested.

"The sixpence I lent you for halves in the jolly old mountain raffle——"

"Yes?" put in Willett suspiciously.

"And the sixpence I lent you to pay back what you owed Benskin."

"I can't pay," said Willett, "I'm broke." His voice dropped, while he fumbled in his pocket. "I spent Benskin's tanner on this. Have you seen one, old man?"

The object which he produced for his friend's inspection was a little six-sided, blunt-pointed top with a spindle-shaped shank, made of a material resembling brass. To this remarkable and mystic toy, Willett, after a stealthy glance round the room, gave a cunning twirl with his finger and thumb; whereupon it came to life and spun furiously, until, after a wobble or two, it expired; to reveal a hexagon uppermost on which was inscribed the mysterious injunction ALL PUT.

"There!" exclaimed Willett. "Pretty idea, isn't it?" His voice was proud, and he eyed his friend contemplatively.

Sparrow took the top and examined it. He discovered that each hexagon was stamped with an insistent but different imperative. Thus, one commanded him curtly to "Put Two"; another bade him, equally briefly, "Put One"; and a third invited him pleasantly to "Take All." He was also enjoined to "Take One" and "Take Two."

"What is it?" he asked.

Concluding his explanation with the remark that "you played a game called Put and Take with it," Willett, watching Sparrow's face the while, came out with a seductive proposition.

"We might," he said lightly, "take on Benskin Minor and the rest."

"What for?" exclaimed Sparrow.

"Well . . . for farthings," murmured Willett, whose instincts for growing rich at others' expense had not been blunted by the Commercial Class.

Sparrow gave the top a twirl and returned it. "We might," he conceded a little scornfully. "But I don't think we shall. I'll let you know, Willett, when I'm starting as a gambler." He turned on his heel. "And don't forget my bob."

His engaging suggestion thus nipped in the bud, Willett bent his hungry way to the tuck-shop where, despite his plea of poverty to his friend, he proposed to invest twopence in chocolate drops, an excellent brand of which old-fashioned delicacy had been added recently to stock. At twelve a penny these chocolates were better value than stickjaw at a penny a chunk still, and, with a passing pang that Ichabod had been written over the shop which he and Sparrow had once set up, Willett procured his drops and took them to a table in the corner where Benskin Minor, Nosworthy, and Till Minimus were occupied in discussing the dainty also. Willett surveyed them a moment, pondering.

“ You men ! ” he remarked genially. “ I’ve got a new game. You each put a drop in the middle . . . no, I’m not going to bag them.” He produced his Put and Take top. “ Now we spin in turns . . . this way ! ”

He stooped till his long nose was almost touching the table. “ There ! What is it ? Take All ! I spun for you, Benskin. You take the four drops. Isn’t it simple ! ”

Benskin Minor swallowed the prize, and agreed that it was. And thus initiated, they replenished the pool, and the game was proceeding merrily enough when two great arms suddenly projected themselves over the shoulders of Willett, who had just been enjoined to Take All ; and both top and pool were deftly grabbed and secured by a pair of singularly red hands, to the accompaniment of a bellow which made the table rattle. No eyes were needed to reveal their discoverer as Bullock.

“ Ho ! ” he roared, cramming the pool down his throat. “ This won’t do, you know ! Who brought this top here ? ”

“ I did,” said Willett in a dejected voice.

“ Then I must impound it, Willett. I must impound it.” And off he swung, with the Put and Take in his pocket.

Nominally Bullock was still looking after Sparrow. But since he undertook that lively duty his lot had not been altogether blessed, and after the affair of his Cousin Laura (when Firmness and

Severity had failed as dismally as his prior methods of kindness) he was feeling a little fed up with things in general and rather shy of Mr. Eggett in particular. Indeed, he gave that worthy man a wide berth, in constant terror of being called upon to try some novel recipe on his charge. And Bullock cherished a violent terror of novelty. Good downright, honest, slogging methods he understood; but he'd tell you to go elsewhere for your fancy stunts.

You would never have called our hefty Bullock original; and yet occasionally he had an idea. Such a one, for example, as came to him a day or two later when he and his crony Palethorpe received a hundred each for copying their French from Bisshopp, E. F., who secured a hundred also for abetting and aiding. For afterwards he drew his fellow sufferers aside, dropping his voice to what he believed was a whisper. "It's perfectly fair," he ended. "Are you on?"

Bisshopp nodding and Palethorpe assenting hopefully, the trio adjourned to the Five Courts, where Bullock produced a small top of a brass colour and proceeded to expound his project.

"Now," he said, "we toss up who has the first spin. And we go on spinning in turn until someone turns up Take All."

"But," interjected Palethorpe, "there's nothing to take!"

"No, you juggins. The one who spins Take All

does all the three impositions. That's simple as pie."

Bullock had found an original use for Willett's toy, and if the idea was his own he may be congratulated. Nor did he run much risk in choosing a Fives court for the scene of what may be termed his lottery. For on nine days out of every ten the Fives courts were deserted at this hour. But to-day the stars in their courses fought against Bullock.

That they did so we must blame Mr. Eggett's digestion. Rarely had the good man suffered such pangs. Warm water and toast, with a little bread and butter and bismuth, had been his portion now for the last three days, and, likening himself to Alexander, he was sighing desperately for new remedies. In which plight he had bethought him of—Fives! Fives! Fives shook your inside up, if anything did. Golf as a cure was altogether too placid; Fives was (or should it be *were*, his punctilious soul questioned) a rattling, robust, dietetic exercise. A little hard on the hands perhaps. Still . . . why not try Fives?

So having shyly purchased himself a Fives ball and a pair of gloves from Brackell & Sons, the dauntless invalid bent his diffident steps to the courts, designing in his modesty to possess himself of the back court (which, wanting repairs, was mainly used by duds) where he purposed to try his prentice hand. He would have that court to himself, he felt sure.

Conceive, then, his disappointment when, as he approached, he heard a strident voice exclaiming "Put Two!"—a term in Fives with which he was not familiar—and, when he slipped inside, to observe three figures squatting on their heels in a circle, their heads very close together, and strangely absorbed. His rubber shoes made no noise as he stepped up and joined them, just in time to behold a little top flop on its side and to hear Bisshopp's jubilant cackle of "You've got it, Bullock!"

They rose to their feet as Mr. Eggett asked smoothly what variation of Fives this happened to be? And after disclosing as much as discretion permitted, Bullock was slipping the top into a pocket of the inner of his three waistcoats, when Mr. Eggett, eyeing him thoughtfully and with a ghost of a smile on his grey lips, observed:

"I think you had better give it to me, Bullock."

Bullock protested. "But, sir!" he exclaimed. "But, sir——"

Mr. Eggett's hand stretched out firmly. "I think so," he repeated. "Now fetch your shoes, Bullock. You shall give me a lesson in Fives."

But with three hundred lines upon his shoulders, and Willett's Put and Take top out of his keeping, Bullock excused himself and went off gloomily. He found no consolation in Palethorpe's insistence that it was always the man who proposed a thing who got let in, but retorted that Palethorpe

couldn't speak English and that, anyhow, Eggett would never play Fives for nuts. Mr. Eggett would have rejoined, had he heard this, that he wasn't playing for nuts but for indigestion.

After twenty minutes' violent exertion, mainly spent in picking up the ball, Mr. Eggett had taught himself to serve, and returned with smarting hands and an aching back. But his sanguine spirit convinced him that he was on the right road. He wondered why he had not thought of Fives before, and presently at the masters' dinner table he surprised them all by venturing on veal. After dinner his liveliness was equally marked.

The masters' Common Room is over the Cloisters, and of evenings cheerful rays are thrown from its windows. Coming across Big Quad (if you're out so late) those windows wink and blink at you invitingly. The curtains are rarely drawn, and, as you approach, you may sometimes catch the sociable hum of voices.

Now on the evening of the day when Mr. Eggett started Fives, the porter, who had been out on some errand or other, was crossing Big Quad when he was pulled up with a start by singular sounds of revelry from the Common Room. An inquisitive man, he stepped to the Cloisters and listened. From his position now underneath the windows, he could catch uproarious shouts and boisterous laughter. The boys were all in bed and asleep long ago, and, reflecting that the masters were

keeping it up, he wondered what occasion they were celebrating? Having stood and listened without growing any the wiser, he was turning to go when, after a moment's tense silence, a voice cried :

“ Put Two ! ”

The porter knew the voice. It was Mr. Eggett's.

“ Put ! ” he echoed musingly under his breath. Then he had it ! It was some form of golf they were playing. Some species of parlour golf that was keeping them up. And, his curiosity satisfied, he returned to his lodge.

The lights burned very late that night in the Common Room, and Mr. Eggett, ere he went to bed, was smiling as he tossed a little top into a tray of odds and ends on his mantelpiece.

II

The porter had gone to sleep to dream of golf, and the Head woke up next morning thinking about it. He had been coming to the conclusion, which he now reached, that perhaps his prejudice was a little old-fashioned, and that, after all, boys who were shut out from active games might be permitted to take up golf. This, he remembered, had been Mr. Eggett's contention, and with a view to discussing the suggestion he sought that gentleman's study after Third Lesson. He was struck with Mr. Eggett's tired appearance.

“ You're looking fagged this morning, Eggett,”

he said, leaning negligently against the mantelpiece.

Mr. Eggett suppressed a yawn. "My digestion," he murmured.

"You've been sitting up too late, man, over your Surds. How's the book going, by the way? Pretty strong?"

Mr. Eggett nodded, with his hand to his mouth.

"Well, now, about this golf. I've thought over what you said. I'm inclined to remove the ban from boys playing, Eggett, and—er—if you like you can—er—put me up for the Dyke Club."

His eyes were measuring his lieutenant's spare frame as he spoke.

"What's your handicap, Eggett?"

Mr. Eggett paused. "Fifteen," he replied.

"H'm! Not so bad," the Head remarked rather largely; and his tones conveyed that when *he* took up the game his handicap would soon be a single figure. If Eggett could get to fifteen after three months' play——

"Very good. Then you might let the boys know, Eggett. And as soon as I'm elected we'll have a game." The Head swung round and surveyed his broad shoulders in the glass, his fingers resting on the mantelpiece. "H'm!" he repeated.

"Fifteen you are, Eggett, eh?"

He had scarcely departed, and Mr. Eggett was composing himself for the few minutes' nap before

the midday meal which had been recommended to him as an aid to digestion, and for which this morning he felt, strangely enough, much inclined, when there came to his door the timid tap he knew well, and he lifted his weary head to observe Sparrow. "Yes?" he groaned. "Yes?"

Sparrow surveyed him much as the Head had done, with an expression of distress and sympathy. "I say, sir," he said, "you do look awfully tired. Don't you think, sir, you'd better rest this afternoon?"

"When I want your advice on my health I will ask for it, Sparrow. What have you come for now? Be quick. I'm busy."

"Yes, sir," sighed Sparrow, his eyes fixed on the long cane chair in which the recumbent form of the sufferer reclined. "I came to say, sir, that I met Mr. Games just now, and he says that I can play golf. Was he pulling my leg, sir?"

Mr. Eggett was about to reply, when a particularly vicious pain in the chest overcame him. It felt like daggers of fire in flesh and muscle. He gave a gasp, then waved a hand feebly; gesticulating, and pointing to the mantelpiece.

"My medicine!" he jerked. "It's behind you! *Ugh!* There! On the . . . *u-ugh* . . . on the mantelpiece."

Sparrow dashed to the mantelpiece in alarm, and after some fumbling found the bottle of mixture. Further fumbling revealed a glass and spoon.

"One table . . . spoon," gasped Mr. Eggett. Sparrow measured it out.

Having taken the glass and drained its contents, the martyr sank back and gestured Sparrow to the door. He remained as he was till just before afternoon school, when he rose, feeling much refreshed and almost equal to Fives.

But if Mr. Eggett's material trouble was assuaged, his mind was uneasy; his conscience was not at rest. His face betrayed that his thoughts were fighting some battle, and though we shall never know all the ins and outs perhaps, an observation he dropped later provides some sort of clue.

"I'll destroy the thing," he muttered to himself.

With determination stamped on every feature, he went to the tray of odds and ends on his mantelpiece. He turned its contents out, and his face grew angry. He searched his mantelpiece. Then sent for Sparrow.

Possibly Sparrow scented trouble at once, for his manner was defensive when he arrived, and his melancholy features were blankly set. Said the testy man:

"How dare you take it, Sparrow?"

"Take what, sir?" Sparrow answered, very demurely.

Mr. Eggett hesitated. "Er—a little—er—top," he rejoined. "It was in the tray upon my mantelpiece, Sparrow. It was close to my medicine bottle."

“A top, sir!” Sparrow ejaculated. “A top?”

“Yes, a top,” insisted Mr. Eggett.

“What sort of a top, sir, please? Do you mean one that spins, sir?”

“All tops spin,” rapped Mr. Eggett testily. “This was a small one, of a yellow material like brass. You must have taken it, Sparrow. Return it at once.”

Sparrow produced a common or garden pegtop. “Like this, sir?” he asked.

“No, nothing of the sort. A much smaller top. A hexagon top with—er—words—er—stamped on the hexagons.”

Opening his large eyes to the fullest extent, Sparrow presented the picture of stupidity. “With words, sir!” he repeated. “Stamped on the hexagon? I don’t understand, sir. Sir, what were the words about?”

Mr. Eggett threw his hands out indifferently. “Some rubbish,” he observed in a careless voice. “Now, Sparrow, stop this nonsense. Where is my top?”

Sparrow appeared incredulous. “Your top, sir!” he muttered. “Is it a sort of humming-top, sir, that you’ve lost?”

Mr. Eggett reflected. “It is not,” he said stiffly. “To be precise, it is a little instrument with which they play a game called—er—Put and Take.”

Sparrow turned the name over on his lips. “What a strange name!” he answered.

“Very,” Mr. Eggett retorted dryly. “It is, I am informed, quite a popular pastime. But not a game for lads, Sparrow. Not by any means.”

“Please how do you play it, sir?” inquired Sparrow.

Mr. Eggett shook his head. “Return that top.”

“Sir,” said Sparrow gently, “I wish I could.”

“What do you mean?”

“I haven’t got it, sir.” He produced the peg-top again. “Won’t this do as well, sir?”

When no cross-examination could extract an admission that Sparrow had removed the missing curio, Mr. Eggett dismissed him with a caution and a stringent warning against gambling. But Mr. Eggett felt dubious and suspicious. Sparrow had appeared altogether too guileless, too innocent. . . . nor could he forget how the lad had fumbled away at the mantelpiece when he was searching for the bottle of medicine!

“I must watch him,” he told himself.

And the very next morning his worst suspicions were confirmed.

Revelation came by the simplest of mischances. The worthy man had just dismissed his Germs and they had clattered off to their classes, when, having collected his books and preparing to follow, he detected a white scrap of paper at his feet, folded in the shape of a cocked hat. This drew his attention; notes had been passing in class: Willett, he remembered, had been to his

desk a few minutes since and obviously had dropped this from his pocket. Thus communing, Mr. Eggett swooped on his find.

My study after Roll on Saturday.

Password—"Take Two." T.W.S.S.

Mr. Eggett shuddered as he read. T. W. S. S.—
Thomas Whitcombe Shirley Sparrow.

Password—Take Two! The criminal stood self-accused and condemned. Sparrow *had* possessed himself of the missing top and was organizing a game on the sly in his study!

Blessing the chance which had given the conspiracy away, Mr. Eggett's first impulse was to tax Sparrow there and then, confronting him with the evidence of his guilt and compelling a confession and surrender. But young Sparrow was a slippery eel to catch, and second thoughts presented a surer method. He would take him red-handed in the act. He would pounce upon the conspirators at their orgy. He would spread his net and secure at a single catch all the youngsters whom Sparrow was teaching to gamble. This would entail the sacrifice of his golf and, possibly, the loss of the monthly Medal. But virtue, he supposed, was its own reward. Mr. Eggett surprised himself in a sigh.

III

As soon as Roll was over on Saturday, he beckoned the coy Bullock. "Bullock," he said,

"I think you look after Sparrow. Presently I want you to come with me."

Sparrow's keeper hesitated, looking almost alarmed. "Sir," he began, "I've got three hundred lines to——" but the other cut him short impatiently. "This won't take long," he rejoined. "I want you to come with me to Sparrow's study. In about twenty minutes, Bullock, my man."

The twenty minutes up, with Bullock at his heels, Mr. Eggett advanced noiselessly to his goal. He listened an instant. Repressed voices sounded within. Very noiselessly still he tried the door, but, as he had expected, the door was locked. Then he knocked and gestured his companion to silence.

The reply to his knock was a sound of shuffling and scuffling through which guarded whispers could be detected. And it may be admitted that up to this very instant Mr. Eggett had been hoping against hope. He had tried to assure himself that it was just possible that, after all, the note had an innocent meaning. But the locked door ripped to shreds the last hope and the guilty noises left Innocence on her bier.

Mr. Eggett gave two insistent raps. This time a frightened voice answered.

"Who's there?" it said tremulously.

"I am!" cried Mr. Eggett. "Open immediately." He turned to Bullock. "As soon as we're in," he bade, "make a note at once of all their names."

Bullock nodded. But they were not inside yet. They heard more rustling and a sound as if things were being moved, and on the heels of this came Sparrow's voice issuing instructions too frenzied to be audible. Then at last the key rasped and in they went.

The sight that met Mr. Eggett's eyes was appalling. Four or five youngsters crouched panic-stricken round the table, and in their midst was Sparrow, who sat, stony-eyed, in some such position as, to judge from the pictures, the croupier assumes at Monte Carlo. By the window Willett lurked, shivering, and two plump legs protruding from under the table proved to be a portion of Benskin Minor. But on the table itself lay the most damning evidence.

In the centre was a muffin dish in which a few pennies and halfpennies lingered still. In front of Sparrow, and neatly graduated to size, a wicked pyramid of coins stood nakedly. There was silver there, half-crowns and florins; and on the very apex two threepenny bits. Yet worse was to come. In the leaves of an exercise book, Bullock unearthed no less than ten I O U's (a form of currency much adopted by Willett).

Mr. Eggett stared in stupefied silence. This was worse than anything he had imagined! Bullock distorted and twisted his truculent jaws into a plausible imitation of horror. Benskin Minor began to whimper softly, and Willett edged

a futile way towards the door. Only Sparrow, caught red-handed, sat stonily on ; like a graven image of Crime, without pretext or plea.

At last Mr. Eggett found his tongue.

“ Put and Take ! ” he exclaimed.

And neither Sparrow nor any of them denied it.

Bullock, who had been ferreting assiduously, reported that the Put and Take top was missing. “ Never mind,” said Mr. Eggett, “ we’ll find it presently.” For clearly Sparrow had concealed or destroyed it while they had been kept waiting outside the door. Taxed, his only reply was a faint, sad smile.

Mr. Eggett pointed an accusing finger at the pyramid. “ And you have been winning these poor lads’ money, Sparrow ? ” he shouted. “ You have made your study a gaming den ! You lure these children here and fleece them, Sparrow.” He tore the I O U’s to fragments as he spoke, and Benskin Minor began to whimper again. “ There, all of you get away ! Except Bullock and Sparrow.”

Then Mr. Eggett read the Riot Act. He pointed out that he was too grieved for words, and that this was an offence which he must take straight to the Head. “ I have no option,” he said. “ You have introduced gambling. And you have done it on a sly and organized scale, and after assuring me that you had not taken that Put and Take top. Well, Sparrow ? What *have* you to say ? ”

But Sparrow had nothing.

Dismissing him to his study in Bullock's custody, Mr. Eggett went immediately on his errand. The job was repugnant, but it had to be done. And best done now, before resolution faltered, before his righteous indignation cooled. He felt deceived and harassed and very upset; altogether in a mood which would chime ill with the homely sights and sounds of domestic happiness that would greet him as he entered the Head's dining-room.

Mr. Eggett sighed. He was a bachelor. And the thought of this happy home-life was touching him strangely. With his feet on the rich pile of the Head's carpets, he could picture well the family scene he would find. The repose of it! The serenity! Mr. Games at his ease by his fireside. Mrs. Games beside him with her fancy-work, and their daughters laughing girlishly over some book. Indeed, it seemed a shame to disturb their tranquillity.

But duty was duty. Mr. Eggett tapped softly and went in.

The picture was not quite as he had drawn it.

There, indeed, were Mr. Games and his wife; and Gracie and Joan, the two girls; and with them Dr. Shrewsbury, that grave old gentleman, who rarely had a smile for the boys he physicked. But Mr. Games was not resting by his fire, nor was Mrs. Games doing fancy-work; no books lay in the laps of Gracie and Joan.

The five of them were clustered round the table, their heads together, the lips of the girls parted eagerly ; and all of them were watching with rapt attention the antics of a little gyrating object ; till presently the doctor emitted a grunt and added two candied plums to a heap in the middle. Then at last Mr. Games looked up and observed the intruder.

“ Ah, Eggett ! ” he cried genially. “ You’re just in time, man ! Bring a chair up. Gracie, give him some powder and shot.”

The youngest Miss Games extended a dimpled arm and handed a box of preserved fruits to Mr. Eggett.

“ Help yourself ! ” she invited him. “ We each start with twenty.”

“ And sweeten the pool with three,” growled old Dr. Shrewsbury.

But Mr. Eggett stood where he was, and shook his head stiffly.

“ Come ! ” the Head exclaimed. “ Be sociable, man ! You’ve seen this, haven’t you ? It’s Put and Take.” He leaned back, laughing softly to himself. “ But of course you’ve seen it. I’d forgotten. I took the liberty of borrowing it from your study when I was talking golf there the other day. . . . Come, Eggett ; find a chair ! It’s a glorious game ! ” He picked up the top and passed it to his daughter. “ Your spin, Gracie ! Give it a good twirl ! ”

"It never spins for me," said Mrs. Games sadly.

"And I've had enough, dad. I'm cleaned out," sighed Gracie.

The Head annexed the pool. "Ah, well, if you won't join us, Eggett, we'll drop it now. Many thanks for lending me the top." As he spoke, he returned it to Mr. Eggett. "Well, what's your news?"

But Mr. Eggett had seen—and heard—enough. Mumbling some excuse, he withdrew in confusion. For almost before Mr. Games had finished speaking an astonishing idea had leaped to his mind. Since Sparrow had not taken the Put and Take top, supposing that, after all . . .

He was back in his study post-haste, and there taxed Sparrow.

"In a word," he concluded, "you laid a trap for me, Sparrow?"

Sparrow regarded him with a gentle complaisance. "Well, sir," he said, "you rubbed it into me so. First that I'd taken your top when I'd told you I hadn't——"

"Yes," Mr. Eggett interjected. "Yes?"

"And next the lesson you read me against gambling. You inferred, sir, that I intended to gamble with it!"

"And so you trapped me into concluding that you were gambling? You dropped that note on purpose?"

Sparrow smiled wanly. "Yes, sir," he said, "I did."

"And all that scene in your study was play-acting? The money and I O U's and the rest of it?"

"We hadn't been playing at all, sir. But you jumped to conclusions."

"You meant me to jump to conclusions!" barked Mr. Eggett.

"Sir, I thought," sighed Sparrow, "that you'd have me expelled."

Mr. Eggett stretched a lean finger towards his cupboard. "You will find the cane in there, Sparrow . . . yes, in the corner." Then he extracted the little top from his pocket and eyed it for a few moments thoughtfully before clearing his table of medicine bottles and books.

"Now, Sparrow," he said at last, "we will try a new game. Or, rather, a variation which I have invented. There, take the top! And give it a good spin!"

Sparrow complied and wondered what was coming. Together they watched it spinning, and marked its collapse.

"Ah," said Mr. Eggett grimly. "*Take one!* Hold out your hand, Sparrow." And the cane descended once on Sparrow's palm.

"Now, spin again, lad!"

"Again, sir?" Sparrow ejaculated with a gasp.

"Again," Mr. Eggett insisted. "Try," he added encouragingly, "to improve on that."

The top sank gracefully, with its blithe permission to *Take Two*. When this permission had been accepted by the cane, Sparrow was invited to try a third spin.

“This shall be the last. Spin away now!”

Sparrow put all his energy into the spin. The top went round as if it would never cease, so steady was it, so full of reserve force. For a hundred and one seconds by Mr. Eggett's watch it kept its horrid secret, flirting with fate. Then it gave three desperate joggles, and sank at *Take All*.

“Ah, three from six is three; that's three to come. You're unlucky, Sparrow; very unlucky. . . .”

And thus saying, Mr. Eggett completed the count and tossed Willett's perfidious treasure into the fire.

Chapter IX

A Clean Sweep

FOR the beginning of the summer term it was unseasonably cold. There was a bleakness almost depressing in the air. But striding back from the Fives courts in a glow from his game, Mr. Eggett felt more of the joy of living than he had felt for a long time. As he halted by the cricket ground, where, although the term was only three days old, the nets were up already and in busy employment, and listened to the voice

of sweated enthusiasts tuned to the brisk music of bat and ball, he tasted fully the delight of feeling quite well, and dwelt with zest upon the forthcoming term. *Eggett on Surds*, as his publishers had reminded him this morning, was selling wonderfully ; the Head had yielded at last to his entreaties and transferred the Business Class to the Games Master ; and that domestic apparatus termed his "digestion" had ceased to bully and vex its tortured tenement, and was (in a couple of words) behaving itself.

But as soon as one stood still, how chilly it felt ! He passed on and up to his room three stairs at a time, where he tossed his Fives gloves cheerfully at the telephone. Then surprised himself in a shiver. It was certainly cold.

He looked at his watch, consulting it thoughtfully. It was barely three o'clock yet. That would give him nice time to correct holiday tasks, a pile of which stood on the table, before attending the Masters' Meeting after Roll. But if he meant to sit still, he must have a fire ; after getting so hot it was silly to risk a chill.

Thus communing, Mr. Eggett turned to the fireplace and eagerly snatched the screen aside from the grate. Thank goodness ! A fire was laid !

Stooping, he placed a match to the paper and wood, which took light sullenly and after some coaxing, as though to protest against a fire in

summer term. But he stuffed more paper and more between the bars, before slipping into his bedroom adjoining, to change.

At once when he opened the door and stepped in again, he caught his breath ; for the room was thick with smoke, so thick that he could hardly see across it. The fire, it seems, was protesting with all its resources against this outrage on its summer retirement. Having ducked and made a dash for the register and satisfied himself that it was up, he flew to the window and flung it wide, just as a noise of choking and spluttering at his back apprised him that he was no longer alone in the room.

“ Who’s there ? ”

A choked but familiar voice answered, “ It’s me, sir ! ”

As Sparrow spoke, the fire belched forth a cloud which swirled and eddied and danced in the draught from the window. This it capped, without any mercy, by a worse one. Sparrow opened the door and stood there, coughing and spluttering, till the pungent yellow haze began to lift and they could make out each other’s face at last.

“ Shut the door ! ” Mr. Eggett cried from the window.

“ I daren’t, sir ! ” Sparrow answered from the doorway. “ If I do, we’ll be suffocated.”

But Mr. Eggett clapped the window fast, and, seizing poker and tongs, attacked the fire so

savagely that he soon reduced it to a smouldering submission. "It wants sweeping!" he kept growling all the time. Then, lightly as the first flakes of the snow, the smuts began to float down and settle themselves.

"But this," exclaimed Mr. Eggett, "is intolerable!"

Sparrow's answer was a choking fit.

"Well, what do you want, Sparrow?" Mr. Eggett was giving him no sympathy, but eyeing him suspiciously.

Sparrow rubbed his smarting eyes with his knuckles. Between his coughs he gasped something about his chest . . . how delicate it was . . . the smoke. . . .

"Get on with it!" snapped Mr. Eggett, hard as a flint.

"Sir," Sparrow managed to splutter, "I want an *exeat*."

"When?"

"This afternoon, sir. If you please, sir. Till Roll."

Mr. Eggett enveloped him in a searching gaze the while he wiped a smut or two from his nose. "Let me see," he mused, "it's just about a year since you first begged me, Sparrow, to induce the Head to expel you?"

"Just a year, sir," sighed Sparrow.

"Are you not glad now that I did not do as you asked?"

"No, sir," said Sparrow.

"Well, you have given me considerable trouble since then. But I think we can say that you have settled down, eh?"

Sparrow's face assumed its saddest expression. "No," he said slowly. "No. I shall never settle down, sir. I am not built for school life. What I want is a private tutor."

"Ah," said Mr. Eggett with a light smile. "Shall we try to regard our friend Bullock as—er—your tutor?" He turned and blew a few smuts off the holiday tasks. "Bullock will make a capital private tutor."

"Do private tutors always wear three waistcoats, sir?"

"Don't be silly. Well, why do you want an *exeat*?"

"To buy a tooth-brush, sir. I've left mine at home."

Mr. Eggett shivered again. It was certainly cold. Sparrow stood mutely watching the smuts descend.

"Yes, Sparrow, you can go; and on your way back call in at Mr. Miggs. You can tell him——"

"Sir, Mr. who?"

"Mr. Miggs. Mr. John Miggs, our chimney sweep. You will find his residence in Paradise Alley. And tell him, with my compliments, that he's a rascal for scamping his contract work during

the holidays. That's the worst of having your chimneys swept by contract."

"Yes, sir," Sparrow assented vaguely.

"Miggs is supposed to have swept all the chimneys during the holidays and left them sweet and clean for the summer, Sparrow. The scoundrel has scamped his job. Tell him to come up before breakfast to-morrow morning and sweep my chimney properly. It's intolerable." And, snatching a duster, the angry man began to dust smuts.

Having adroitly managed to dodge Willett, who, penurious as ever, was lying in wait for him by the Well Door, Sparrow bent his eager steps to the town and procured the latest thing in patent tooth-brushes. He then bethought himself of Paradise Alley, which he found at last somewhat coyly concealed near the river. With a bright beam for the most juvenile of the residents who were taking their air on the doorsteps, and side-stepping just in time to avoid a dust-pan of assortments which a lady who was Spring cleaning had finished with, he pressed on to the corner house with the bow window, adjoining a yard which displayed the remains of three greenhouses with a stack of brown-glazed drain-pipes and other ornaments. From the bow window a creaking signboard projected.



Sparrow was admiring this announcement and envying the catholic talents of Mr. Miggs, when a youth in his shirt sleeves strolled to the gate of the yard and lounged there, after a glance up and down the street. Riding breeches and gaiters below a stained khaki tunic gave his appearance just that sporting touch which a bright blue neck-cloth and a bowler hat topped; and he replied to Sparrow's nod with a solemn wink that indicated a nature sociably disposed.

"Want anything, mister?"

"Am I speaking," Sparrow inquired, "to Mr. Miggs?"

"T'old 'un's ill," was the answer. "I'm his son."

"Ah," said Sparrow, "a chip of the old block."

"We don't sell firewood, mister," rejoined the youth, after a cursory glance at the contents of the yard.

“That’s a pity,” said Sparrow. “But do you sweep chimneys?”

With another wink and a jerk of his thumb towards the signboard, Mr. John Miggs junior indicated that he did.

“And can you beat carpets?”

Mr. Miggs nodded.

“I see.” Sparrow had begun to finger his chin in a brown study. “And can you,” he said slowly, “conduct funerals?”

With a dab at his bowler hat to prevent it tumbling, Mr. Miggs junior lurched two heavy strides forward. “I’ll conduct yours, mister, if I have any more of your lip.”

So Sparrow, backing discreetly, disclosed his errand. In the regrettable absence of Mr. Miggs senior, would his son come up and sweep Mr. Eggett’s chimney?

“To-morrer?”

“Yes.”

“What time, mister?”

Sparrow hesitated. Six o’clock in the morning seemed rather a dull time for a sweep to roll up. To his way of thinking, an original feature would be introduced if Mr. Miggs junior, khaki tunic, bowler, and all, rolled up for his job in the afternoon. And, thus reflecting, he named three o’clock.

“What! Three in the morning!” exclaimed Mr. Miggs in disgust.

“No. Afternoon, of course. And to the tick.”

"Right! I'll be there," said the chip of the old block.

"Good day," said Sparrow.

"Good day!" Mr. Miggs junior lurched back into the yard, where he was soon lost among the drain-pipes and greenhouses.

Sparrow had reached the High Street on his way home, when who should issue from the sports shop but Bullock? He was carrying a somewhat lengthy parcel, secured with a great deal of brown paper and string, and his eyes lit up as soon as they fell on his *protégé*. The latter, taking to his heels with much presence of mind, was only captured after a smart burst, encumbered though Bullock was with his clumsy parcel. For clumsy enough, at least, it seemed to Sparrow, when it had been thrust into his arms and he had been bidden in tones that brooked no refusal, to carry it back at once to Bullock's study. "I'm coming along presently, young Sparrow. You go straight ahead!"

"Please," Sparrow ventured curiously, "what is it?"

Bullock spun him round twice and gave him a thrust towards the School. "Mind you don't play the fool with it, Sparrow!" he cried.

Deciding that it was too heavy for a fourth waistcoat, Sparrow discharged his errand, when he met Mr. Eggett, who asked if he had remembered his mission to the sweep? Assured that Mr. Miggs had not been overlooked, Mr. Eggett

inquired what time the good man would arrive?

"At three o'clock in the afternoon, sir," said Sparrow.

Mr. Eggett frowned. "Too busy, I suppose, to come in the morning?" And taking Sparrow's silence for assent, he hastened off to attend the Masters' Meeting.

II

In his standing attire of breeches, tunic, and bowler, Mr. Miggs junior arrived in capital time, driving up in a little cart with a neat pony, which he tethered to the gate at the avenue's end. Having alighted with his brushes over his shoulder, and swinging a bag and dust-sheet in his free hand, he lurched an envious way up the avenue, for the sounds of the School at cricket reached his ears and made his sporting spirit ache to join in. He would have been much happier hitting sixers than sweeping chimneys, any day in the week.

Not a soul was about. And this was a great nuisance. For although he had a rough idea how to find Eggett's, he had no notion which was Mr. Eggett's study. Still, he must trust to luck; and, once inside, probably he'd come across some one to ask.

No sooner had he turned through Eggett's archway than, as he anticipated, he found some one. But the manner of the encounter was hardly conducive to the issue and receipt of instructions.

For, his brushes professionally balanced, when he rounded the archway, simultaneously he received in the middle of his stomach the impact of a hefty and burly frame which arrived head foremost, hurtling through the air. Indeed, if Mr. Miggs junior had not, so conveniently, played the part of buffer to Bullock's onrush, that enterprising but truculent individual could never have looked after Sparrow again, because he would have broken his neck on the spot. He had mixed himself up somehow with a long stick arrangement, towards the bottom of which a couple of rests, or struts, appeared to be jutting out on either side.

"Steady on!" exclaimed Mr. Miggs. "Who are yer shoving?"

The flags of the corridor not being a feather bed, Bullock spent a few moments rubbing his shins, while his buffer stooped to recover his dust-sheet and bag, which the shock of the collision had sent flying. Thereafter he stared at Bullock and his odd apparatus, and remarked that the former's face could do with a wash.

"It's got a bit sooty," smiled the chip of the old block.

Though Bullock had lost his balance, his manners remained. "I'm much obliged," he said, straightening his three waistcoats. "My aunt! I'd have come a purler if you'd not been there!"

"You would," Mr. Miggs assented. "But what's that there stick?"

"The stick!" echoed Bullock. "It's what I came head over tip from!"

"I seen you," grinned Mr. Miggs. "But what do you call it?"

"It's easy enough," Bullock said, "when you've got the hang of it. But I only bought this yesterday. I'm practising." And, mounting the struts, he turned his back and went off, taking little leaps and springs down the corridor which were not unlike a kangaroo jumping in splints. Then, hopping and bobbing—but cautiously—Bullock returned.

"There!" he declared, rather proudly. "It's easy enough!"

"Aye," said Mr. Miggs junior. "But what's the idea?"

It was Bullock's turn to stare. Was it actually possible that the fellow had never set eyes on a pogo stick! "You're pulling my leg," he said. "You know what it is."

"I don't," said Mr. Miggs junior, "but I'm just wondering if I could do the same with one of my brushes?" His sporting eye was gleaming as he spoke, and dwelt on Bullock's with an unvoiced appeal, which hinted that one good turn deserves another.

Bullock displayed the stick. "You see," he said, "here's a spring. That gives you the hop and jump, you twig . . . like that!" He grinned amiably. "Have a try for yourself!"

There was no need to invite the chip of the old block twice. He uttered a whoop and, dropping the tools of his trade, he mounted the stick, made a spring, and descended on his back. This he did three times running with much enjoyment, but at his fourth attempt he made ten yards before coming down all fours on his hands and knees.

"It's easy!" he observed, as he picked himself up.

"Dead easy," agreed Bullock. "Try again."

By now they were almost half-way up the long corridor, and Mr. Miggs completed the distance successfully. This so pleased him that when Bullock brought him his implements, he leaned them up against the wall at this far end, just where the corner turned at a right angle, and announced his intention of having a "proper go."

"I'll pogo," he vaunted, "to the archway and back!"

"I'll run behind you," said Bullock, "to break your falls."

"Me fall!" laughed Mr. Miggs, adjusting his tunic and cramming his bowler hat well over his brow. "You watch me, mister! I'll show you how to pogo. All you've got to do is to keep your 'ead!"

"Yes," agreed Bullock. "That's all you need to do."

The rôle of instructor being thus, apparently, swopped, the chip of the old block spat on his

hands, gripped the pogo stick as though he would never let go, gave a grunt and a heave to his body, and went off in style. Down the corridor he hopped more kangaroo-like than ever; got half-way before he came to ground with a crash; but was up and off again in masterly fashion with Bullock in attendance at his heels. Though he thumped his shoulder against the wall at the end, he grinned with delight and, after a moment's rest, announced his intention of a final "go" back again. Bullock, who was beginning to form the opinion that if you gave Mr. Miggs an inch he would take an ell, assented cordially to the "final" part of the project; and off the couple went on the journey back.

This proved quite the smartest of Mr. Miggs junior's efforts. It was accomplished without a tumble at all. Indeed, you must have given it full marks, seeing that the last spring landed Mr. Miggs precisely opposite the spot where he had leaned his brushes. There, on the wall, was the grimy smudge they had left. But the chimney sweep has yet to be invented who can manage to sweep a chimney with a smudge—otherwise Mr. Miggs junior would not have complained. But he wanted his brushes, and his brushes had disappeared.

His soot-bag likewise had taken to itself wings. And his dust-sheet was no more than a memory.

"I'll swear," he gasped and gaped, "that I

left 'em there! To that I'll take my haffydavy all day!"

"I'm blowed if you will," laughed Bullock. "Give me my stick."

"But I did leave 'em agin that blighted wall, didn't I?"

"You did," said Bullock. "Give me my stick back, please."

"Then wot I wants to know is, where 'as they gone?"

"How should I know," growled Bullock. "Here! Give me my stick!"

The eye of the worried Miggs became suddenly cunning, as, hugging the pogo stick, he confronted Bullock. "Don't I know a put-up job when I sees one, mister. See this nose"—he tapped the organ with a leer—"can't it smell a rat as far as most folk. I thought you was distinguishably haffable when you offered me a ride on yer stick. 'Ave a try,' says you, and while I'm trying your confederate 'e comes an' nicks my brushes——"

"Of course he didn't, you ass!" interjected Bullock.

"And mebbe I'm not the only ass, as you'll find," cried the chip of the old block, whose blood was well up. "You think becos you're at College and I'm a sweep"—he paused to shake a fist under Bullock's nose—"that you can come your monkey tricks over me. Me! Why I've eaten

'Uns twice your size ! You give me my bloomin' brushes afore there's trouble ! ''

He was very angry. He was very angry indeed. But Bullock, as we know, was no lamb-like creature, and he squared his truculent jaw with a savage growl. " You give me back my pogo stick ! " he reiterated. " And clear out, or I'll boot you into the Quad."

" *You'll* boot me ! " sneered Mr. Miggs.

" I will," said Bullock, looking, every inch, quite equal to the attempt.

Mr. Miggs junior had made up his mind to one thing. He would not restore or part with the pogo stick unless and until his brushes were restored. He felt sure that Bullock had some confederate, who had nipped round the corner and gone off with his belongings while his back was turned upon his career down the corridor. Very well, then. A fair exchange was no robbery, and if he couldn't pogo soot out of chimneys, he could bring Bullock to his senses by keeping his property.

" For the last time," Bullock roared, " will you give it me back ? "

" Gimme my brushes ! " was all Mr. Miggs rejoined.

He was gripping the stick tight behind his back, and ere he had finished speaking, Bullock sprang. Mr. Miggs riposted by jabbing his free hand into his adversary's waist and butting him on the chest at the same time. This crushed the crown

of his bowler but drove back Bullock, who recovered himself with a savage shake of the shoulders and went for Mr. John Miggs junior bald-headed.

That is to say, we have Palethorpe's word for it that Bullock made this onslaught of his "bald-headed." For Palethorpe, who had come to the end of his innings, had invited Burton and Bates to pop into the House to see how Bullock was getting on with his pogo. "Let's go and watch him tumbling about," he said. And arriving on the scene at the very instant that Bullock and Mr. Miggs came to grips in earnest, they found their old friend tumbling about indeed, but not quite in such manner as they had pictured. One striving to grab the stick, the other to keep it, the two were grunting, wrestling, and rocking with intertwined legs; and now the fortune of battle would veer to Miggs, and now to the heftiest forward in Castlegate. Their breath came in great gasps, Bullock's collar was torn, and the corridor was heavy with clouds of dust.

"Separate them, old man," Bates invited Palethorpe.

Palethorpe looked at him, then back at the combatants. "You can try," he said thoughtfully, "if you like."

"But who's Bullock's pal?" cried Burton. "Go it, Bullock, old bean!"

"Go it, Bullock!" Bates echoed. "You've got him stiff!"

And Palethorpe began to shout. "Good old Bull!" he was screaming.

III

Now Mr. Eggett's nearest way in from the Fives Courts was through the door at the back. Taking this short cut home, from a capital game, he climbed the back staircase to the second-floor corridor, where he was astonished to find his study door locked. But when he listened and caught sundry noises within which resembled the rattle and thump and twisting of brushes, he remembered that it must have gone three o'clock, and that the sweep should be practising his pleasant profession. No doubt the worthy fellow had locked himself in so that he might do his job undisturbed. Accordingly, Mr. Eggett rapped on the door and inquired in a loud voice:

"Is that you, sweep!"

After a pause, a muffled reply sounded, "Yes, sir."

"Will you be long?"

A voice which seemed to proceed from the chimney said, "No."

Only able to reach his bedroom from his sitting-room, but satisfied that he would not have to wait many minutes, Mr. Eggett was wondering how to fill up the time, when the question was answered for him by an uproar which rose in a sudden gust from the ground-floor corridor. To

judge from the cries of encouragement and advice, this unseemly uproar suggested a rough-and-tumble, and when he had hurried down to investigate, he found that it was a rough-and-tumble indeed! A strange figure in a khaki tunic and gaiters was struggling and wrestling with . . . yes, certainly with one of his boys. This was enough. With a scathing glance at the onlookers, he rushed between the two dauntlessly, and tore them apart. Then he stood gasping.

"You, Bullock!" he ejaculated. "You, of all people!"

Dishevelled but unvanquished, breathless but proud, Sparrow's private tutor faced Mr. Eggett, while Palethorpe led the audience's retreat to the discreeter vantage of the archway. But John Miggs junior did not budge an inch. Vindictively grasping the pogo stick still in one hand, he drew the back of the other across his wet forehead, and, his chest rising and falling like the flanks of a winded horse, he planted his feet wide and prepared for the worst.

But he got in first blow by repeating the cry for his brushes.

"You tell him to gimme them, mister! You tell him yerself!"

But Mr. Eggett had not yet recovered from the shock. He was genuinely distressed and profoundly amazed. "Bullock!" he repeated despondently. "And I looked to you to set an

example to Sparrow ! You fighting like any street Arab ! You brawling with strangers ! ”

“ Well, sir,” Bullock panted, “ I want my stick back ! ”

“ And I want my brushes ! ” chimed the chip of the old block.

If a look could have turned the chip to a block of ice he would have congealed instanter before their eyes, so freezingly did Mr. Eggett regard him. His gaze travelled from gaiters and breeches to bowler, and back ; and then it seemed to explode in a fiery cry :

“ What are you doing here, man ? What are you doing ? ”

“ My duty,” said Mr. Miggs thickly. “ Gimme my brushes ! ”

“ Your brushes ? ” rapped Mr. Eggett. “ Er—are you an artist ? ”

Unbuttoning the breast pocket of his tunic, the young man thrust in a dirty finger and thumb, and produced a slip of cardboard not much cleaner. This he handed to his cross-examiner, who adjusted his spectacles and read the following :—



JOHN MIGGS, JUNR.

LANDSCAPE GARDENER.

Chimneys Swept

Carpets Beaten

Funerals Conducted

MANZOR

Mr. Eggett's reply, when it came, was a trifle odd. For he tore the card into bits with a snort of disgust, and, tossing the fragments aside, remarked :

" You're a liar, man ! "

" Me ! " cried the stupefied chip.

" You are also a thief ! "

" I'll have the law——"

" A liar, I said, and a thief," Mr. Eggett proceeded. " You must have stolen this card. Where did you get it from ? "

" You ask my ole guv'nor ! " cried Mr. Miggs junior.

" But you don't *look* like a sweep ! " exclaimed Mr. Eggett.

" 'Ansone, mister, is as 'ansome does. You gimme my brushes an' I'll show you if I'm a sweep ! "

But Mr. Eggett had a card up his sleeve. He knew that he could bowl this impostor out. So now he sent down his metaphorical yorker.

" Man, the sweep is at my chimney this instant ! "

Expecting that the stranger would throw up the sponge and beg his pardon, no doubt, for trespassing, the reply that came like a flash amazed him still more. " Then that," cried the chip, " is where my brushes 'as got to. Your name will be Eggett, mister ? Where is your room ? "

" Yes, I am Mr. Eggett."

" Then show us your room ! "

“My pogo stick, please?” cried Bullock, as they went off.

“Not ‘arf,” replied Mr. Miggs, “till I’ve got back my brushes.”

Determined not to lose sight of his property, Bullock started in immediate pursuit; and a rear-guard to the main body was thoughtfully formed by Palethorpe, Bates, and Burton; and Benskin Minor, who, mooning along at the moment and finding “something up,” attached himself to their heels like a little dog.

In this order they arrived at the floor above and at Mr. Eggett’s door, which stood wide open. It was obvious, then, that the sweep had finished and gone. He had left the window as wide open as the door, and the room in a state of more or less tidiness. A dust-sheet covered the table, and on the dust-sheet stood a bag containing some soot. But so little was the soot they found in the bag that it was clear the sweep had not got much from the chimney, and as soon as he saw this, Mr. Miggs poked his head up the fireplace, declaring, after a few professional sniffs, that the sweep hadn’t known nothing about his bally job. “Blow me,” he sneezed, “if ‘e’s ‘ardly swept it at all!”

Then he sprang round to the much-amazed Mr. Eggett, who could make neither head nor tail of the whole performance. “Mister,” he demanded, “where is my brushes?”

For no brushes were to be seen. Assisted by Palethorpe and party, who were most energetic, they ransacked the room, but all that rewarded their search were three long bristles discovered upon the hearthrug. It was natural that the sweep should go off with his brushes, but why then had he left his soot-bag and dust-sheet? And if he had used not his own brushes but Mr. Miggs junior's, the plot (as Palethorpe whispered to Burton) thickened. A glance satisfied Mr. Miggs that the sheet and bag were his, which turned him to Mr. Eggett again to observe that those who lived in glass 'ouses shouldn't throw stones, and that misters who called gents thieves should mind what they said. "You were bloomin' quick," he explained, "to call me a thief, mister. But it seems you've the thief in your college. He's pinched my brushes!"

They searched the corridor and adjoining studies, and several brilliant solutions were proffered by Palethorpe, and even Benskin Minor put in a word. But the most brilliant idea of all came to Mr. Miggs junior. For, sticking to Bullock's pogo stick like a leech, he suddenly exclaimed and, bidding them follow, made a dash down the staircase and out through the archway. They streamed in his wake, making capital time down the avenue and on to the gate where his pony and cart had been left.

They were gone.

But Mr. Miggs gave a shout and pointed down the road.

Barely a hundred yards off they saw pony and cart, jogging comfortably towards the town with the road to themselves. And, what was more, they made out by the driver's right shoulder a stack of black things which nodded like plumes in the wind. "My brushes!" cried Mr. Miggs. But he clung to the pogo stick.

The driver of the cart was not alone, and just then his companion stood up after a struggle and appeared to be meditating a flying leap out. Bullock's keen eyes detected this passenger as Willett, who did not look as if he were enjoying himself.

They were now to say good-bye to Mr. Miggs junior. For at this sight of his pony and trap absconding, his eyes kindled with the spirit of the chase, and, mounting the pogo stick, he sprang off in pursuit. This was the last they saw of the chip of the old block; and, incidentally, of Bullock's possession.

"Well, Sparrow?"

"Yes, sir, I nipped round the corner and borrowed the brushes."

"What were you doing with them in the cart?"

"I thought Mr. Miggs had gone, sir. I was taking them back."

"Very thoughtful of you," remarked Mr.

Eggett. "Was your action in first taking them—er—premeditated?"

Sparrow shook his head. "On the spur of the moment, sir. I just turned round the corner, and there they were! I thought I'd like to sweep your chimney myself, sir." He paused and dropped his voice confidentially. "I thought, sir, of going in for chimney sweeping, sir, when I'm expelled."

"Indeed, Sparrow!"

"I thought I might get the contract for sweeping the school chimneys, sir."

"Not you! You made a very bad job of mine."

"I'm sorry, sir," lisped Sparrow. "I did my best."

"Well, now we'll make a clean sweep of it, Sparrow. Hold out your hand!"

Chapter X

Squaring Accounts

THE Head inhaled deep breaths of the clean air.

"Ah, Eggett," he said, "it's good! It's like champagne!"

Sunday morning Chapel was just out, and the two were pacing the cricket ground, a habit Mr. Games had adopted from the seniors, who passed and repassed them now, in pairs and threes, in cheerful converse and with arms companionably linked. The Head had grown fond of this Sunday

cricket-ground custom, for it pleased him to descend, as it were, for awhile and move thus intimately among his boys, exchanging ever and again some greeting or word.

Mr. Eggett liked it too, but he liked it better when the Head had attached himself affably to some little party, leaving him to keep his own company. For then, with his thin hands clasped behind his back, his shoulders drooping, and his gentle eyes searching the turf, he would pace up and down with some problem in higher mathematics, or, in latter days, with some more acute problem of golf. This morning, for example, his thoughts had been wrestling with the conundrum of brassie *or* cleek for his second shot at the fourteenth, when of a sudden he had found the Head at his side and his attention side-tracked to matters of trifling importance.

“Yes,” the Head repeated, “a wonderful day! Listen! What a concert the birds are giving us!”

Mr. Eggett assented dispassionately.

“Ah, Eggett, my friend, you’re not a lover of nature. When you hear the birds sing don’t you want to sing too?”

“I do not,” said Mr. Eggett.

“Well, each to his taste. Give me the simple delights; the—er—flowers, and so forth, and rivers, you know, and blue sky. And the fresh air, Eggett. Gallons of it!”

Mr. Eggett said nothing, but his eye kindled

like the eyes of some wise old hound that of a sudden scents danger hiding ahead. His profound knowledge of his companion began to admonish him that the latter's abrupt enthusiasm for fresh air was being paraded for the purpose of leading up to the disclosure of some new project or policy. And since he had learned to regard with a certain misgiving the versatile innovations of his chief, which, attractive as they might be in principle, in practice always ended upon his shoulders (as witness the bright idea of the Business Class!), he entrenched himself at once behind a stiff silence; but all the time he was taxing his wits to divine wherever the Head meant his flowers and birds to arrive?

"*Quo vadis?*" he murmured, but not loud enough to be heard.

And then he had it! He felt sure that he had it. The Head had made up his mind to start a Field Club, and, of course, to put *him* in charge—to make *him* responsible! He would be expected to sacrifice a good deal of his golf to go rooting about with a net and a pickle jar, and a bevy of urchins as bored very likely as himself. He would be required, loathsome vision, to stick pins through moths, and to explain why toads had jewels in their heads. He understood, at least, that toads had precious jewels in their heads, but his acquaintance with natural history was not precise, and the very idea of fingering a toad made him ill. . . .

No! A thousand times—No! He must flatly decline to have anything to do with the Club. His business was teaching Maths., not collecting frogs.

They had taken two turns in silence ere the Head spoke again.

“Do you know, Eggett, this wonderful weather sets me thinking?”

“Boys should stick to football and golf,” rejoined Mr. Eggett.

“Eh? I don’t quite follow you, Eggett. Where’s the connection? I was remarking that this wonderful day sets me thinking.”

“Insects are nasty things to fiddle and faddle with.”

The Head cast a concerned glance at his second-in-command, wondering if the sun were too hot for him? But his lips were so tight, his face so grimly collected, that it was impossible to believe that his mind could be wandering. So, with the concession of a vague little laugh to what he took to be Mr. Eggett’s humour, he replied, “Yes, yes,” and then, with some emphasis, “Eggett, I’ve been thinking of a new scheme.”

He paused; and as he appeared to expect an answer, Mr. Eggett released a very cautious “Indeed!”

“In summer time, and in one particular, our method with the boys, Eggett, is wrong.”

The words flooded Mr. Eggett’s soul with relief. After all, this sounded less like bug-hunting than

some plan for holding open-air classes ! But his voice was guarded still, as he answered, " You think so ? "

" I do, Eggett. In this lovely weather of summer term, get at boys, I say, through their skins or stomachs ! "

A school treat ! thought Mr. Eggett, changing his mind.

" You don't follow me, Eggett ? Well, listen. A boy does wrong. We punish him. But how do we punish him ? Nineteen times out of twenty we set him an imposition. What's the effect of that, Eggett ? Think a moment ! "

" Spoils his handwriting," Mr. Eggett said sharply.

" Tush ! No, it keeps him indoors. Don't you see, man ? It keeps him indoors when he ought to be out in the air that's so good for him." The Head halted to inhale his specific more deeply. " Boys are growing creatures and want open air. So, in summer terms, Eggett, instead of setting impositions we'll punish delinquents either through the skin or the stomach ! "

" The skin ? "

" With a cane," smiled the Head.

" And the—er—stomach ? " said Mr. Eggett, a little shyly.

" Ah, that's just where my new idea comes in. The stomach ! What do boys put in their stomachs ? "

“Everything,” Mr. Eggett said, with a sigh.

“Quite. They stodge at meals. And they stodge between meals. Now, how do they get the stuff to stodge between meals?” The Head was a Classic, and loved the method Socratic.

“They buy it.”

“What with?”

“Obviously, Mr. Games, with their pocket money.”

“‘Obviously’—that’s the word I wanted. The more money the boy has the more he can buy. Conversely, the less he has the less he can buy. You agree?”

Mr. Eggett nodded. He never argued the obvious.

“And the less they can buy, the less they can put in their stomachs?”

“Speaking generally, yes,” replied Mr. Eggett.

“Very well. Now you’re visioning my idea. Instead of punishing offenders with impositions, in summer term we’ll punish them through their stomachs. So we ensure them a larger supply of fresh air and curtail the harmful practice of eating between meals. I wonder I never thought of it before!”

“You mean that you will dock their pocket money, sir?”

Mr. Games’ reply came very slowly. “We will institute a system of fines, Mr. Eggett. A boy will not be given an imposition, but fined so much, to be paid on the spot. You take me?”

“ Ah ! Any—er—tariff ? Any scale ? ”

“ We will temper the wind to the lamb to be shorn,” said the Head, with his hearty laugh for his own joke. “ The masters will use their discretion as to amounts. All fines will be put in a special box, and the proceeds will be given to the School Mission.”

Mr. Eggett fingered his beard. “ It might act,” he remarked.

“ It’s got to act,” cried the Head. “ Oh, I’ve thought it all out. Browns, the ironmongers, have got just the box that we want . . . I have seen quite a number of them, with keys, in the window . . . I shall buy one to-morrow.”

“ And you, of course, will keep the box, Mr. Games ; and whenever a master wants it he’ll send to you.”

Though Mr. Eggett said this with an air of assurance, the Head’s reply did not take him at all by surprise. “ The box,” the Head said, “ will be kept by you, Eggett.”

“ But, I would suggest that you, sir——”

“ Well, we’ll split the trouble. I’ll keep the key.”

And this was the manner of the institution of the box which soon came to be known as the “ E.L.B.,” abbreviation for “ the Egg’s Little Bit ” ; it being scandalously rumoured that its custodian employed its proceeds to keep himself supplied with fives balls and golf balls, since the E.L.B. lived permanently on his writing table and

could only be used on application to him. Its custody harassed the poor man considerably, for a master, when he proposed to levy a fine, had first to send the offender off for the box, and, after the levy had been solemnly deposited, to see that the E.L.B. was as carefully returned. At times when its services were briskly competed for (as on that day when the Games Master lost his temper with the Germs while simultaneously Monsieur Beaupré was driven wild by his French class), this posting to and fro became such a nuisance that thereafter Mr. Eggett took it with him into class, where it stood at his elbow ready for one and all.

The Head's division of the labour came on Mondays, when he opened the box blithely and counted the spoil.

It does not appear that Castlegate in the bulk shared the Head's enthusiasm for his new principle. Fresh air was all very well, they told one another, but it didn't go as far as shillings and pence. Besides, the more fresh air you had, the more peckish you felt ; and again, you could often get a help out with impots, but a fellow couldn't pay his fine by proxy.

And putting its case in this way, Castlegate owned no gratitude to the Head for his concern for its health, but felt like erecting a statue to the benefactor who could persuade Mr. Games to revert to the good old system.

It was a very expensive week with the E.L.B. that at last stirred Bullock to action in self defence. With Palethorpe to back him up, he bearded the Head while the latter was watching cricket one afternoon. He had given considerable thought to his plan of campaign.

Having weighed the matter up, he concluded shrewdly that his chance of success would be improved if he presented himself as the champion of others rather than in his own cause, if he took a witness in support of a general plea. And looking round him for some such witness, whose extreme youth and innocent demeanour might be relied upon to touch the Head's heart, his choice fell upon the well-nourished, but infantile, Benskin, and he bade him gruffly come and bear him out. But although Benskin Minor had suffered horribly under the new system, prior to which he had practically lived in the tuck-shop, his awe of the Head was so deep and his spirit so timorous that he would have faced a den of lions rather than enter the presence with a complaint. So he made a dash for freedom when his advocate had primed him, but, as he was not built on racing lines, Palethorpe secured him with ease, and led him back by the ear. Thereupon the trio arrived in Court, so to speak ; Bullock threatening the witness with ghastly penalties if he failed to back him up when put into the box.

Bullock gave a great cough to attract attention.

"May I speak to you, sir?"

The Head replying by scanning each in turn, till Benskin felt the marrow melt in his spine.

"Yes. What is it, Bullock?"

Put Bullock in the thick of a Rugger scrum and his light would shine; a great lantern of courage. But in the Debating Society it merely glimmered. So the speech he had prepared went clean out of his head, with the result that he came to his point with singular bluntness.

"Fines are rotten. Can we go back to impositions?"

"Do you speak for yourself?" the Head asked sharply.

With a sign to his ally not to let go of Benskin, the advocate muttered that fines were "jolly bad for the kids."

"Such as our emaciated Benskin?"

"Yes, sir," said Bullock, wondering what "emaciated" meant.

"Come along, Benskin! Let's have a look at you!"

Wishing that the earth would open and swallow him, Benskin advanced his rounded but tremulous figure.

"Ill-fed Benskin, do *you* object to fines?"

The witness gaped speechlessly.

"Tell me, have chocolates between meals been prescribed for you?"

Benskin's knees knocked, but he gave no answer.

"Well, tell me? Are chocolates essential to your system? Are they a *sine qua non*, my starving child?"

A sharp prod in the back jogged the witness's memory, and a voice behind him whispered "Say yes, or I'll slay you." Thus prompted, he got so far as opening his mouth, but, after a gulp and a gasp, it shut again.

The Head turned to Bullock. "Anything else to observe?" But ere he had finished speaking, his eye was attracted by a solitary figure which, with its hands in its pockets and its coat ruffled up into the small of its back, had halted some thirty yards off to watch the cricket. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "There's friend Sparrow. We'll ask him, Bullock!"

Sparrow arrived to the summons and stood there dejectedly. The further he could keep from Bullock the better; and what could the Head and the Bullock want with him now?

"Cheer up, Sparrow! Don't look so miserable."

Thus adjured, Sparrow's face set more dismally still. Bullock in the meantime displayed some generalship by shifting his position out of the Head's direct line of view, and from this vantage he sought to coach Sparrow by pantomime, pulling horrible faces to indicate that Sparrow must take the cue to his answers from him.

"Sparrow," said the Head, "one question, my lad."

Bullock's grimaces were reinforced by his fist. His action was meant for a warning of what would happen unless Sparrow gave the answers that he would signal.

"Yes, sir?" sighed Sparrow.

"Would you rather pay a fine, Sparrow, or do an imposition?"

"If you please, sir! What have I done, sir!" Sparrow protested.

"Don't be silly. What I mean is this. Do you prefer our system of fines to impositions?"

Sparrow's eyes were placidly resting on Bullock, who, with a fist raised still and scowling fiercely, rounded his lips and framed the word—"impot" . . . "impot." He kept on doing this, while Sparrow stood silent.

"Well, Sparrow, fine or imposition?"

"I'd rather pay a fine any day, sir."

The Head dismissed him, retaining Bullock a moment, and if Sparrow on his retreat had been accompanied, such companion might have seen his left eyelid rise solemnly twice and fall again over its eye. He was reflecting, perhaps, how different his answer would have been if that big nuisance Bullock hadn't endeavoured to dragoon him. He declined to pull Bullock's chestnuts out of the fire for him, and particularly if Bullock tried to bully him.

So Sparrow winked again, for his own benefit. "That's that!" said he, addressing the ambient air.

II

"But," moaned Willett, "I haven't a single bean!"

"That's not my fault," said Sparrow.

"But you got a postal order in a letter this morning. I saw it."

"Yes. Five-and-six. But I'm not going to lend it you."

"Well, you might spare a chap a tanner, at any rate."

"And pigs might fly. No, I want every penny; particularly."

"For what?"

"That's my business. But if you really must know, it happens to be the Old Egg's birthday on Thursday."

Willett gaped like a fish on the point of expiring. "You don't mean to say you're going to buy him a present?"

"Who knows?" replied Sparrow. "If——" but he got no further, for a hand twitched his sleeve and he turned to observe Benskin.

"Bullock's looking for you," Benskin whispered in a scared voice.

"Where is he?"

"He's just coming out of changing-room."

Before the words had well left Benskin's lips, Sparrow had withdrawn at the quick march. But cautiously. Indeed, for the last three days all

his comings and goings had been ordered with caution. Aware that Bullock was thirsting for his blood, and seeing no reason to walk into Bullock's jaws, he trod circumspectly ; courting comparison with the tight-rope walker upon his rope. But the latter has a net to break his fall, whereas, as Willett was too chicken-hearted to be of much use, Sparrow in his jeopardy could only rely on himself.

Yet this is not quite correct. He had one ally who had sprung up from an unexpected quarter. Remembering how nobly he had done himself in the tuck-shop Sparrow had started last Christmas term, and lost in admiration of the valour with which Sparrow had faced the Head and Bullock together, Benskin Minor had made timid overtures of attachment, expressed, to begin with, in the terms of a pot of jam.

It was thus that Benskin, in the rôle of scout, brought the timely warning that sent Sparrow prancing away.

But Bullock was a huntsman of no mean parts, and very likely his motto was Slow but Sure. He was stalking his prey this afternoon with a method ; and he did not hurry himself, for preserves were small. What he did was to post observers (beaters, he termed them) at appropriate spots for heading the game off, and thus, his battue organized and his net spread, he awaited reports from Palethorpe, his head *shikari*.

News reached him very soon that the quarry had been sighted making for cover in the swimming baths, from which it had been duly headed off. It was next reported near the Double Trees, whence it might have made a dash for the open had the beaters not been drawn across its path. Checked here, it was heard padding down the avenue; where, finding the exit manned, it had turned in its tracks; till presently Bullock gave a great bark of delight when they told him that it had taken to earth near the servants' quarters.

There, in a dark angle of the wall between the laundry and the engine-house, the huntsman found his quarry and hauled it forth. Sparrow was flushed and hot, but his eye was cold and his manner scarcely suggested the stricken animal. Brushing the dust from his knees, for he had been crouching, he inquired if Bullock happened to be looking for him?

"None of your cheek!" thundered Bullock. "Come along, my gay lad!"

"Where did you think of going?" Sparrow asked pleasantly.

"We're going to your study. To be by ourselves."

"Yes, it's cooler in there," said Sparrow, in the airy tone he might have used with Willett. "You look a bit hot yourself, Bullock. Have you been running?"

Bullock's only reply was to grip his captive's

wrist tighter ; and not a word more escaped him till they were alone.

"Now, Sparrow," he said, standing squarely before the closed door, "you and I have got a bone to pick."

"I say ! Did you know a button was off your top waistcoat ? "

"Never mind my waistcoats. You and I have a bone to pick."

"I never pick bones," Sparrow murmured. "I'm nervous of choking."

"If it hadn't been for you, young Sparrow, that sweep merchant wouldn't have collared my pogo stick ! "

Sparrow smiled faintly, as the picture returned of the chip of the old block in pursuit of his pony.

"And if it hadn't been for you, Sparrow, I might have bounced the Head into chucking the E.L.B."

"I don't think," said Sparrow.

"Now, look here, young son ! I heard you told Eggett you wanted a private tutor ? "

Sparrow nodded assent.

"And the Egg said you were to consider me as your private tutor ? "

Sparrow's eyebrows rose slightly.

"Well. A keeper's one thing. A private tutor's another."

Sparrow stared silently.

"I say a keeper's one thing, a private tutor another ! "

"I'm not deaf," sighed Sparrow.

Bullock leaned his great bulk forward and, clenching his fist, brought it down with a thump upon the table.

"By Gosh!" he roared. "I'm going to tutor you, Sparrow. I'm going to private-tutor you straight away." He drew from his pocket a book he had slipped inside it before he started off on his hunting trip. "Sit down!" he commanded. "Get your pen and some paper."

Sparrow went on staring. "What for?" he exclaimed.

"We're going," said Bullock, "to begin with dictation."

Very swiftly Sparrow weighed each *pro* and *con*. If he resisted, his tutor would probably slay him: if he complied, well, it wouldn't do any harm, and a bit of dictation was a cheap price to pay for a quittance. So that Bullock was surprised and a trifle suspicious when he was told that his offer was frightfully kind as Sparrow *did* want to improve his dictation.

"None of your cheek, young Sparrow. Are you ready?"

"Yes, thank you," said Sparrow, having found his paper and pen.

"Take down!"

Bullock opened his book and set off. "'Parocipital bones——'"

Up shot Sparrow's hand in approved fashion.

"I say! Are those the bones we're to pick?" he cried eagerly.

"Don't be an ass. Get to it. I'll start again." And Bullock went off again at the top of his speed:—

"Paroccipital bones distinguish the Mesozoic order of synaptosaurian reptiles. These are the plesiosauria. But the ichthyornis was an extinct toothed bird, the terminal vertebræ of whose spinal column were fused together to form a pygostyle, while the tibio-tarsus is thoroughly avian. This removes the ichthyornis from the primitive Archæopteryx, although it was as predaceous and carnivorous as the ichthyosaurus, which was strongly addicted to molluscs and teleostomes . . ."

Pausing to take breath and looking up from his book, Bullock observed that his pupil was sitting transfixed, without a single word on the sheet before him.

"Haven't you got that?" he roared.

"I haven't begun yet," sighed Sparrow. "You go rather fast!"

"Oh, well, I'll go more slowly," said Bullock grudgingly. "'Paroccipital bones——'"

"Please, how do you spell them?"

"This is dictation," came the stern retort.

Sparrow groaned, but his pen made a dash at the paper.

Maintaining a more reasonable rate, Bullock arrived once more at his molluscs and teleostomes, while his docile pupil made no further demur, but took his fences, so to speak, like a

man. He dealt dauntlessly with every word as it came, and by the even pace that his pen was travelling you could have judged it on intimate terms with Bullock's menagerie.

"Yes?" he said, when Bullock stopped. "Yes? What's next, Bullock?"

"Nothing," Bullock growled. "Now we count mistakes."

"Shall I read back, or will you?" Sparrow asked very cordially.

"Got a blue pencil?"

The pupil tendered one, and surveyed his tutor.

Comparing the printed page with Sparrow's effort, Bullock got busy with the blue pencil at once; and when he reached a very laborious end, he looked up and said fiercely:

"Twenty-three mistakes!"

"Is that all?" exclaimed Sparrow.

"You haven't got a single hard word right!"

"No, I didn't think I had," said his pupil gently.

"Well, what are we going to do about it, young Sparrow?" Bullock's tones were not a bad imitation of the Head's, but his manner was very hard and menacing.

"Would you like to read them all out again, Bullock? I don't mind another shot. I don't really," said Sparrow.

"No, young Sparrow; you've had your chance,"

declared Bullock. "I've got to punish you. It's my painful duty." He dropped his elbows on the table, nursing his chin, and searching Sparrow's face with a slow grin.

"Twenty-three mistakes! And you told the Head, Sparrow, that you'd rather have a fine than an impot. 'Any day!' you said. Very well, I must fine you."

And into Sparrow's mind streamed revelation. Then this was what Bullock had aimed at from the beginning, from the moment that he had armed himself with the book! Had he but guessed . . . but it was too late now. . . .

"Twenty-three mistakes, my poor lad. At threepence a mistake, that's sixty-nine pennies. Yes, five and ninepence. Out with it, Sparrow, my son!"

"But I've only got five-and-six," Sparrow answered sadly.

"Threepence discount for cash," conceded his tutor.

"And that's a postal order. And, Bullock, I want it."

"My child," said Bullock magisterially, "you should have thought of that before you made your mistakes."

"But what will you do with it? Do you give it back?"

Bullock exploded. "I'm not an automatic machine. Does the E.L.B. give your money

back ? ” He reflected an instant. “ But I won’t be hard on you, Sparrow. It hurts me more than it hurts you to punish you. Hand out that order ! ”

Reluctantly, but seeing no help for it, Sparrow produced the crisp slip from his pocket and surrendered it to his private tutor. In return the latter tore a scrap from the dictation and wrote on the other side and gave it to Sparrow.

*ON DEMAND I promise to Pay 5/6. A.
Bullock.*

“ There,” he said, “ the Business Class teaches one something.”

Sparrow handed it back at once. “ Five-and-six, please,” he said.

Bullock grunted and pondered deeply, chewing his stub of pencil. Then he scribbled something under the previous words, and returned it to Sparrow with a hearty chuckle.

His thoughtful addendum ran thus :

*But you’d jolly well better not
demand it too soon. A. Bullock.*

“ There ! ” he chuckled. “ I think that will meet the case. And that finishes to-day’s private tu, young Sparrow.”

“ Thank you,” said Sparrow with his eye on his tutor’s breast pocket. Then he made a final effort to recover his money. “ Bullock,” he said,

speaking very earnestly and naturally, "I want that five-and-six awfully. Please give it back."

But the private tutor had chuckled himself off.

III

Returning to his room after Third Lesson on Thursday, Mr. Eggett found a parcel of vast dimensions, but by the time he had undone half a dozen or more coverings, each tied more tightly than anything he remembered, he reached the kernel which revealed itself as a small volume dealing with Excavations in Palestine, and announcing in deplorable script on the fly-leaf that it conveyed the wishes for Many Happy Returns of Thomas Whitcombe Shirley Sparrow, Castle-gate School.

Reflecting how very nice this attention was, Mr. Eggett had begun to turn the leaves when the Head appeared, wearing festal tweeds and that particularly breezy and hearty expression which he always donned when he came to request a favour. Before he spoke his lieutenant had guessed what was coming.

"Ah, Eggett, many happy returns of the day! They tell me it's your birthday. Many of 'em, old man!"

His lieutenant nearly blushed. "Yes, thank you," he murmured.

"And I wonder if you'd do me a little kindness? Fact is, I'm compelled to run up to town at once.

I wonder if you'd—er—take my classes this afternoon ? ”

“ With pleasure,” said Mr. Eggett untruthfully.

“ Thanks very much. I knew you wouldn't mind. You can fit them in with your own. It won't be much trouble.” The Head had been searching his pockets while he was speaking. “ And, by the way, have you got any small change on you ? I've nothing but two five-pound notes and a ten-shilling one. One wants some copper, and so forth, for the porters, you know.” He extended the ten-shilling note. “ Will you change it, Eggett ? ”

Mr. Eggett went to his pocket and found three pennies. “ I'm sorry,” he smiled. “ I'm in the same boat as yourself.”

“ Well, never mind ! ” But even as the Head spoke, his eyes fell on the E.L.B. on the table. “ Why, of course,” he said, producing his bunch of keys, “ we can change it from the box, I dare-say.”

He raised the box, which replied with an affable rattle, and unlocked it and turned it over into his palm. “ How much should there be ? ” he asked carelessly.

Mr. Eggett totted up the little book in which the masters recorded the fines they imposed. “ Let's see. You cleared it on Monday, Mr. Games. There should be five . . . seven . . . nine . . . : yes, nine-and-elevenpence.”

“Well, there *is* the four-and-fivepence of it, Eggett.”

Mr. Eggett looked up in alarm. “Are you sure that’s all, sir?”

The Head nodded, counting once more the money in his hand. “That’s all!” he snapped. “It’s five-and-sixpence short.” And in his disgust, he lifted the box and shook it, whereupon there fluttered down something small and white which alighted gently on the cloth.

The Head got to it first, and after a scrutiny which puckered his brow and made his mouth straighten grimly, he rushed to the window and, thrusting forth head and shoulders, bade the first boy he saw below to send up Bullock. Then, swinging round, he stared at his second-in-command with a face that was both stupefied and indignant. All his breeziness had gone. He looked hard as a rock.

“But this,” he cried, “is terrible! It’s terrible!”

His expression when Bullock arrived was truly alarming.

“Bullock, you are the boy who objected to fines?”

Bullock grinned uncouthly.

“Bullock, have you been to this money box?”

The question came with a crack like the smack of a whip, and Bullock’s hardy courage reeled to the shock. He had never been so taken aback

in his life. He glanced from one to the other, but reading no sign in Mr. Eggett's embarrassed, averted eyes, he repeated the question dully under his breath. Had he been *where* . . . or had the Head gone dotty. . . .

"Have you been to the fine box, Bullock, I ask you?"

Then Bullock gave a fierce scowl and collected his wits. "No, of course not, sir!" he shouted indignantly.

"You're certain?"

"Dead certain," growled Bullock.

Mr. Eggett winced, with a sharp little cry; but the Head continued in tones that were now like frost:

"Very good, Bullock. Now listen! I'll read you something. 'On demand'—are you listening, Bullock?"

Bullock emitted an incredulous grunt.

"'On demand I promise to pay 5/6. A. Bullock.' Are you listening, Bullock?"

"Yes, sir," the private tutor managed to stammer.

"'But you'd jolly well better not demand it too soon. A. Bullock.'" The Head thrust the scrap of paper under his nose. "Is that your writing?"

"Yes, sir," said Bullock gruffly. "It's mine right enough."

Then the Head struck home. "And that piece of impertinence was discovered, Bullock, in my

fine box! You took five and sixpence out in exchange for—that!”

H. M. L. L.

“Ah,” remarked Mr. Eggett, as he put away his cane. “I am glad that the Head left me to deal with you, Sparrow. And I’m glad that you managed to put Bullock all right with him. That is an affair between Bullock and yourself. What *I* have just punished you for is for going to the box.”

“Yes, sir,” sighed Sparrow, blowing upon his fingers.

“But how did you open it, lad? The Head had the key.”

“He had *a* key, sir,” Sparrow said artlessly. “But Browns have any amount of those boxes in their shop, and they are all of a standard pattern with the same locks and keys.”

Mr. Eggett stared. “But you only had five and sixpence, and all that went in—er—another direction . . . yes, you forgot to rub out the price in my nice little book. And those money boxes cost half a guinea apiece. However did you buy one?”

“I didn’t, sir,” Sparrow murmured. “I got in on appro.”

“On approval, *if* you please,” Mr. Eggett corrected. Then he crossed his thin legs and leaned back in his chair, contemplating the culprit through his glasses. Behind the glasses the ghost of a twinkle played.

"Well, Sparrow," he said at last, "it may interest you to learn that you have done the fellows a good turn. One might almost term your prank the last straw. Yes, we are going back to impositions, Sparrow. Your effrontery has persuaded the Headmaster to abolish our agreeable E.L.B."

Mr. Eggett paused, and drew a deep sigh. His voice had been charged with regret; but the twinkle belied him.

"Whatever shall I do for my golf balls?" he said.

Chapter XI

Sparrow Founds a New Firm

"YES, it is unfortunate, Bullock, very, that your football accident should be keeping you out of the cricket field. However, I have found a nice little job for your spare time."

Something like a groan escaped Bullock's lips. "Sir," he protested, "I have taught Sparrow all I can teach him."

Mr. Eggett smiled. "Ah, and how's his dictation? So you've had enough of private tutoring, eh?"

"Yes, sir," came the stony assent. "I have."

"And yet," said Mr. Eggett musingly, watching the bubbles rise in his glass of water as the latest thing in digestive capsules dissolved itself, "and yet, private tutoring is an interesting

pursuit. However, I have found you a hobby to replace it. I want you to reorganize the library."

Bullock's jaw dropped and he gazed for a moment speechlessly. His physical eyes were on Mr. Eggett's face, but his mental eye had flashed to the School's great Library, with its tiers upon tiers of stately tomes which nobody ever looked at, so far as he knew, and which he himself had certainly never entered.

"But, sir!" he expostulated. "I say, sir! You know——"

Mr. Eggett sampled his medicine and cut him short. "My dear Bullock, devoted as you are to the Classics, you cannot suppose that I refer to *the* Library. I refer, of course, to the boys' lending library, which has been allowed to get into a shocking state. The Headmaster, who chanced to notice it, was speaking to me of it only last night. All the books want wrapping in brown paper covers. And the Headmaster thinks that you should have—er—a catalogue, Bullock."

"Denison is librarian, sir," growled Bullock.

"I have spoken to Denison. He is too busy with cricket. The question is, what responsible senior can we spare best?"

"But I never read books, sir."

"Then it will be a nice change for you, Bullock."

"And I don't know the name of one author from another!"

"Quite immaterial, Bullock. You will bring a fresh mind to it."

"But, sir, there are lots of men who——"

"There, that will do. You will call in all the books that are out now, and close the library to borrowers for a week; or longer if you want the time. But a week should be enough to re-cover and catalogue. I congratulate you, Bullock, on the appointment."

Disgusted and disgruntled, Bullock withdrew; appalled at the prospect of spending his leisure in the "junk shop," as for some unknown reason or other some wit of the Stone Age had christened the far end of E classroom which housed the shelves containing the lending library. His ruffles were not smoothed by Denison's broad smirk as the latter handed over the insignia of office (a couple of note-books calling themselves catalogues, scribbled all over with pencil and red ink addenda) and, clutching these with every indication of loathing, he took a gloomy way to the scene of his labours, and scowled upon it for a few thoughtful moments.

Reorganizing! The Egg was right: it did want reorganizing! The books, mainly fiction and travels, were flopped about anyhow, and many of them were half out of their bindings, while a few were positively thick with dust. These he found, on inspection, to be the poets.

He set his truculent jaw and muttered fiercely.

All these beastly books had to be re-covered in brown paper, had they? And a clean catalogue made of the whole bag of tricks! All right! If the job had to be done, by Jove, he'd do it! It should be something, when he'd finished, to be proud of!

With which Bullock stripped off his coat and his two waistcoats (he had discarded one now the summer was in) and plunged with a savage face at the nearest shelf, as though it had been a scrum on the Rugger field.

II

Benskin Minor, as well nourished as ever, stood and regarded Sparrow piteously. He was labouring under a grievance—a strong grievance—and being now in the habit of bringing his troubles to Sparrow, whom he had come to regard as a species of demi-god, he had sought him out and found him in the act of rebutting sundry skilled arguments which Willett was advancing for a loan.

“And what does our Benskin want?” inquired Sparrow, hailing the opportunity of changing the subject.

“Bullock drinks my milk,” was the dreary reply.

“Your what?”

“My milk,” said Benskin. “My milk at eleven o'clock.”

Sparrow eyed his suppliant's plump exterior, his pendulous cheeks and rounded diaphragm.

"So you," he said, "are one of the milkmen, are you?"

He was alluding to the careful and pleasant custom by which certain favoured individuals, whose constitutions were popularly supposed to require a supplement to regular meals, went every day to Hall after Second Lesson to drink a glass of milk there provided for them.

"And do you mean to say that you're a milkman?"

"My people think I ought to have it," said Benskin.

"Well?"

"Well, Bullock laps my milk up every day, Sparrow!"

"But what's Bullock doing there? How does he get to Hall?"

"Bullock has milk, too," said Benskin, sadly.

"Bullock——"

Benskin nodded. "Bullock has milk, too. They say he has to have it because of his footer accident. I don't know if that's true. I only know, Sparrow, that before he begins on his he laps up mine."

"I see," said Sparrow, drawling the words like a magistrate. "But isn't anybody there to stop him?"

"No. He's the biggest fellow who has milk."

Sparrow glanced at Willett. "Well, go on," he bade.

"Well, the glasses of milk are put out on the table ready for us. Mine's always at the far end, nearest the window. Bullock gets in first almost always, and just walks up to mine and swigs it off."

"Then why don't you collar his?"

Benskin's eyes started nearly out of his head. "I daren't!" he gasped.

"I see," said Sparrow again. "So you're wasting away because you have to go without it, Benskin?"

"Well, I don't see why Bullock should always swig it."

"No, you'd much better lend it a chap," assented Willett.

But Benskin's ears and eyes were all for his demi-god. "As a rule," he sighed, "there's such lovely cream on it, Sparrow."

"Very good," said Sparrow dispassionately. "Did Bullock give you any reason for bagging it?"

"Yes," bleated Benskin, "he says I am too fat. He says I ought to be in training, you know."

"What for?"

"Next year's Sports, I believe," said Benskin shyly. "Bullock says unless I start training now I'll never be fine-drawn enough for the Hundred."

"Ah," said Sparrow, in the dreary tones of one overpowered by trouble, "Willett and I will

go into the matter and see if anything can be done for you, Benskin. Willett and I——”

But his ally cut him short with a cry of alarm. “No,” he exclaimed. “I rode with you in the sweep’s cart; that was enough, Sparrow. Thanks frightfully, all the same, but leave me out, please!”

Dismissing Benskin with a wave of the hand, Sparrow turned upon his recalcitrant partner. “Well,” said he, “last time that I told the Old Egg that I really couldn’t stick school life any longer——”

“Go it!” grinned Willett.

“Don’t interrupt. It’s rude. The Old Egg answered that I’d simply got to make the best of things.”

“You do,” remarked Willett.

“He also said I’d got to help myself. He said that Providence helps those who help themselves.”

“Then,” put in Willett, “I suppose it’s bound to help Bullock.”

“So,” Sparrow went on in his melancholy voice, his features fixed as dismally as ever, “I’m going to take the Egg’s tip and help myself. I’m going to start a firm on purpose, Willett. Sparrow & Co.”

“Who’s the Co.?” cried Willett immediately.

“You are,” said Sparrow.

But Willett shook his head. “Not much!”

“The firm,” said Sparrow evenly, “must have a Co. Sparrow & Co. sounds better than plain

Mr. Sparrow. I am the senior partner. You are the Co."

"But I don't see a bit where the Co. comes in?"

"No more do I at present," assented Sparrow. "But time will reveal. Meanwhile you're a sleeping partner."

"What does a sleeping partner have to do?"

"Sleep, I suppose," said Sparrow a little testily. "Now here's our first case."

Willetts's face had been brightening as the head of the firm spoke. "I say, Sparrow! Of course we charge fees!" he cried. "That means that you get half and the Co. gets half." He smacked his lips. "How much do we charge Benskin?"

"Nothing," said Sparrow, "we're philanthropists. 'And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame'—you know your Kipling? Sparrow & Co. will work for the joy of the working."

"You don't look very joyful!" retorted Willetts. "Well, look here! Has the firm any funds?"

"None," said Sparrow firmly. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, it might lend the Co. a tanner till Saturday. Or . . . fourpence, Sparrow . . . threepence? Be a good chap!"

Very carefully Sparrow drew from his pocket a purse, from which he extracted a twopenny stamp and two halfpennies. "Here is your first month's salary," he observed.

Willett pocketed the money before replying. "But Co.'s," he said, "don't have salaries. They draw profits."

"*And share expenses,*" sighed Sparrow. "Give me that back."

But Willett shook his head. "Well, what do we do?"

"While you've been jawing, Willett, I've been thinking. We shall handle this matter of Benskin's straight away." So saying, Sparrow rose and removed the cover from "Digesto," as he had come to call his little portable typewriter, after the famous remedy of that name on which he had bestowed such a striking testimonial. And pausing only for consultations on spelling, he tapped the keys as industriously as an ant, until at last he handed his partner the following:

To Archibald Bullock, Esq.,
Castlegate School.

DEAR SIR,—

Our client Mr. Benskin Minor has been to see us about the painful matter of his milk. Mr. Benskin alledges that you go into Hall and swig his milk saying it isn't good for his training.

We don't know what Mr. Benskin's in training for and we don't think he'll win the Hundred if he does train, but we can't allow you to lap up our client's milk. So we beg to inform you that

if you do it again we shall be compelled to procede against you.

Your obedient servants

SPARROW & Co

Self-Help Merchants

signed T. W. S. Sparrow,

Managing Direkter.

“But,” gaped Willett, “you’re never going to send it!”

“I am,” said Sparrow solemnly. “Why not?”

“He’ll slay you, Sparrow!” cried Willett, trembling already.

“He’s slain me before,” sighed Sparrow, “but I’m alive still. What’s the good of being a firm unless you do business?”

Willett’s face was as white as the sheet of paper. “Suppose,” he whispered, “Bullock asks who the Co. is?”

“Let him ask,” said the senior partner, sealing the envelope.

III

Bullock was getting on like a man with his library. He had called in all the books on loan; manufactured a great number of brown-paper covers, and with infinite labour had made a rough draft of a new catalogue, during which he had told the junk shop without mincing language exactly what he thought of Mr. Eggett. It would

be a long, long time before he forgave the Old Egg.

Meanwhile that saturnine and shrewd dyspeptic, whom Bullock averred to be as deep as they make 'em, displayed a lively interest in the work and would constantly inquire how it progressed. Very gravely he would implore Bullock not to lose himself in *reading* his books, but to resist temptation until he had got them all ship-shape,—"as if," the librarian would protest to his friend Palethorpe, "I cared tuppence for the rotten things' insides!" And Palethorpe could only reply, "Bad luck, old man!"

Bullock growled, then, but progressed (as good Englishmen will) and this afternoon, with the end of his labour in sight, was enjoying a saucer of tea in Palethorpe's study, when a pale-faced youth of frightened bearing appeared and stammered, "Sparrow asked me to give you this, Bullock."

Bullock read the note with a frown, and his large ears crimsoned. Then he scanned it again, and his ears grew redder. When he tossed it across to Palethorpe, his face was furious, but he waited for his friend to make the first comment.

It came concisely; in the form of a sharp cackle.

"Yes," said Bullock in the voice that came from his boots. "I suppose it's meant to be funny."

Palethorpe cackled again. "You are private tuing him, aren't you, Bull?" he added.

"I was," said Bullock gruffly. "And now I must slay him."

"But do you drink——"

"That fat kid's milk. Of course I drink it, Palethorpe." Bullock slapped his broad chest. "What's one glass of milk to me?"

"Not much, I suppose," said Palethorpe, a little dryly. "But anyhow, it's nothing to do with Sparrow." Palethorpe laughed again. "I see he's a Company now."

"'Sparrow and Co., Self-Help Merchants,'" recited Bullock. His face grew thoughtful. After all, if he slew Sparrow . . . well, experience showed that it was rather like playing with fire. "I think this time, Pale," he said, "I'll let young Sparrow off. I'll just give him a kind warning. He doesn't mean to be cheeky."

"Oh, no," agreed Palethorpe, with a queer twitch of the lips. "But you're not going to—er—do what he says, I suppose?"

Bullock reddened again. "Is it likely?" he roared. "I shall swig fat Benskin's milk as much as I like." And going to the door he bellowed for a kid, whom he sent to fetch Sparrow immediately.

So promptly did his ex-pupil appear that he must have been expecting and waiting the summons. And meeting Bullock's eye with kindly composure, he broke the ice by remarking airily that interviews were always better than letters

"At least I find it so in my business," he added, with a gesture that politely included Palethorpe.

"Now, young Sparrow, come off it!" Bullock retorted. "What do you mean by sending me this rubbish?"

"Messrs. Sparrow & Co.," replied Sparrow in the tones of a man who is repeating something committed to memory, "always try to make their—er—communications intelligible. Messrs. Sparrow & Co. mean just what they say, Bullock."

"Oh!" roared Bullock. "And I, Sparrow, mean what *I* say. I say that I shall drink that young porpoise's milk whenever I feel so inclined. Now, what about it?"

"Yes," Palethorpe seconded quickly. "What about it, Sparrow?"

Bullock turned on his friend. "Dry up!" he thundered.

Over the cheerless features of Messrs. Sparrow & Co.'s senior partner an expression of pained but pious surprise had been stealing; and now his only reply was a faint shrug, which appeared to indicate resignation. And when Bullock saw him standing thus dumbfounded, he roared again, but now with the laugh of the victor.

"Young cock-sparrow, I'll let you off this time. I was going to slay you, but I'll let you off. I suppose you thought your letter would panic me, what?"

Sparrow nodded meekly without a word.

"Well, don't be so cheeky again. Are you

grateful that I haven't slain you?" As he put this question, Bullock glanced at Palethorpe with a look which clearly invited his friend to note, mark, learn, and inwardly admire his successful rôle of lion tamer. Not that Sparrow had ever looked like a lion; and now his appearance suggested a veritable lamb.

"Yes, Bullock, I'm jolly grateful," he lisped as a lamb might have lisped.

Now, his tamer had been fingering and examining the type-written communication from the new firm, and a thought must have struck him as its writer reached the door, for he called him back and, surveying him contemplatively, exclaimed suddenly: "I've got it! By Jove! I've got it!" Then he drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, and a sheet of brown paper folded in two with a triangular cut at the top and bottom of its middle. Brushing Palethorpe's tea things out of the way, he spread these on the table and beckoned Sparrow, bidding him take a jolly good look at them.

"You see those, Sparrow. That brown paper is a cover for a book. These names I've written down are the names of books and authors. That's a catalogue, Sparrow. Do you understand?"

"I daresay I should if you explained it, Bullock."

"Don't be a little ass. Well, I am librarian. I am reorganizing the lending library."

"The very man for the job," said Sparrow politely.

"And that's just where you and your typewriter come in. You are going to help me, young Sparrow. I've a brilliant idea."

"How nice!" remarked Sparrow.

"For each of these covers you will type the name of the book and the name of its author. I was going to write them, but typing's better. Like this, you see," Bullock went on, consulting his notes. "*Pickwick Papers* at the top; by—er—yes, by *Charles Dickens*, in the middle. When you've typed your labels, we'll gum them on. See?"

"Splendid!" said Sparrow, whose face had not moved a muscle.

"Also, you will type out the catalogue. Alphabetical order. Authors' names first. The names of the books opposite. There! Take them. You can get busy straight away. It will be a bit of a job. But no mistakes, mind! I can't allow a single mistake in the catalogue. No crossings out or corrections. All beautifully typed."

"Yes," said Sparrow. "How very jolly, Bullock!"

His melancholy face had actually lightened, and he spoke as one on whom high honours are conferred.

"And may I call myself assistant-librarian?" he begged.

"You may," conceded Bullock, with dignity.

"Thanks frightfully, Bullock."

When Sparrow had stuffed the papers into his pocket and gone, the librarian sank into a chair and stretched out his legs with all the air of utter self-satisfaction. "You see," he observed to Palethorpe, "I know how to handle him. He's feeding out of my hand, Pale. I've tamed him, what?"

There followed now a very strenuous period for Sparrow & Co., Self-Help Merchants and Assistant Librarians. The sleeping partner was bundled out of repose to read to the senior partner at his typewriter, and likewise to gum the backs of the title labels which were to be affixed to the brown paper covers. When the sleeping partner kicked (as he did all the time), he was informed that the firm must honour its obligations; and when he retorted that *he* had not been consulted, he was firmly reminded of his subordinate capacity. He would then insinuate his readiness to resign, suggesting as a capable successor young Benskin; whose milk, he pointed out, was still finding its way down the unscrupulous gullet of the librarian-in-chief.

"So I don't see," he grouched, "what beastly good Sparrow & Co. are!"

But the only answer was the typewriter's clatter.

And the job was done at last. It was splendidly

done. Not a single erasion or alteration in the catalogue; and every title slip cut exactly to scale. A proud and complaisant man was the librarian as he supervised the labelling of all the books, and their segregation into their sections by Sparrow & Co. "And now," he bade Willett, when he had placed the new catalogue into position, "go and fetch the Old Egg to see what a fine job I have made of it."

Nothing loth that Messrs. Sparrow & Co. should reap their due share of any compliments that might be forthcoming, Willet was hastening off when a thought struck him. "I say, Bullock, we've swotted jolly hard," he remarked. "Do you think you could lend a man sixpence, Bullock?"

"I'll lend you a kick——" began Bullock, but Willett had gone.

The compliments which the sleeping partner had visualized were duly tendered when Mr. Eggett arrived, although the share of Sparrow & Co. was sparse. Bullock was clapped on the back with genuine enthusiasm: he was told that he had exceeded all expectations: that his ungrudging toil was appreciated by the Headmaster: that the School had never had such a librarian: and so forth, et cetera.

"And," said Mr. Eggett, turning to leave, "you shall re-open it to-morrow after tea, Bullock. I'll attend myself, and say a few words."

"Very good, sir," Bullock answered importantly.

And just for an instant it occurred to him to put in a word of thanks to his leading assistant, who, mutely and apparently unconcerned, had been watching the inspection with dreary eyes. But instead, as soon as Mr. Eggett had gone, Bullock cast a last satisfied look round, and snatching Sparrow by the ear, remarked with a grin :

"So there you see what a fellow can do on milk !"

Sparrow twitched himself free. "I don't follow," he lisped.

"Do you think," growled Bullock, "that I could have completed a big job like this if I hadn't kept my strength up on fat Benskin's milk !" He began to shake with laughter at his own wit.

"Couldn't you ?" Sparrow inquired very gently.

"No, I could not !" jeered Bullock. "Milk is the stuff for stamina. And I'll tell you another thing, you self-help merchant ! This enormous task has so much undermined my strength, that I'll have to carry on with Benskin's ration."

"You're going to pinch it still ?" said Sparrow mildly.

"I am," laughed Bullock. "Yes, you bet I am."

"I see," sighed Sparrow.

IV

It was on the stroke of twelve the very next morning, and Mr. Eggett was about to dismiss his class, when the door of the classroom opened to admit the Head, who was accompanied by a stranger of venerable aspect.

The Right Reverend Joseph Hailey, Bishop Suffragan of Castlegate, would not very long be a stranger to Castlegate School; but as he had only recently received his appointment and come into residence in the Cathedral Close, this was the first opportunity he had enjoyed of making the acquaintance of Mr. Games and the School of which, by virtue of his office, he was one of the Governors. The Head had shown him round the Chapel and Hall; they had discussed the prospects of the Cricket XI and the tendency of the age to neglect Classics, and he was now to be introduced to the second-in-command. The classroom sat dumb.

“Mr. Eggett”—the Head’s voice had a smack of patronage—“I want you to make the acquaintance of our Bishop. This, my lord, is my good friend Eggett, my Second Master.”

Hastily concealing a bismuth capsule which he had been on the point of popping into his mouth, Mr. Eggett shook hands and expressed the great pleasure he felt, with similar platitudes which the classroom greedily absorbed.

“And I think,” the bishop said blandly, “that you write books?”

Mr. Eggett bowed his head and inwardly fumed.

“And speaking of books,” his lordship continued, “I understand that your school has a wonderful library. Yes, yes, Mr. Games,” he went on hurriedly, as the Head interposed with something the room could not catch, “yes, thank you extremely. I shall enjoy nothing so much as a peep at it some other day. But what I was going to say, Mr. Egg, was this. Books are splendid for boys. Poetry, Fiction, Adventure, General Reading. All these stimulate and—er—open the mind so. I envy you your gift, Mr. Egg. I do truly. You must be proud of the delight you have given to boys!”

“The books I write,” Mr. Eggett said dryly, “are textbooks.”

Just for an instant the bishop appeared confused. But he recovered his composure marvellously. “Just so, just so! Most interesting!” he rejoined. “But that does not affect my argument, does it?”

“Not at all,” said the Head.

The bishop turned to him. “Have you anything here in the shape of a boys’ lending library? Stories, you know, and so forth, Mr. Games?”

On the point of informing their visitor that they had, the Head remembered the shocking condition of the junk-shop when he had last seen it, and

cast a diffident glance at his lieutenant. But Mr. Eggett came to the rescue with a flourish of trumpets.

"My lord," he replied, "we have a splendid lending library. It is most cleverly arranged and carefully kept."

"Ah, do you look after it, Mr. Egg?" was the genial acknowledgment.

"A boy is librarian, my lord." Here Bullock shivered.

"Whom have you recently appointed, Mr. Eggett?" Interposing thus, the Head laid careful stress on the last three letters of his colleague's name.

The latter raised his finger and beckoned the heavy form of the bashful and embarrassed librarian, who lurched into the limelight with a sheepish grin.

"This is Bullock, my lord. Our splendid librarian."

Bullock bowed clumsily.

"You are fond of reading, my boy?" said the bishop.

"Yes, your lord," said Bullock in his deep, resonant boom.

"And some day, I suppose, you'll be an author yourself?"

"No, your lord," growled Bullock, scowling at Palethorpe.

The latter, when telling his friends all about it

afterwards, averred that Bullock's deep boom almost knocked the poor bishop off his pegs. But Palethorpe spoiled the effect by going on to relate how the bishop patted Bullock on the head and congratulated him upon his modesty. There is a great future, the bishop said (so Palethorpe said), for a boy who loves books, Bullock, as you must do, and asked genially the name of his favourite author; the librarian (according to Palethorpe) glared sullenly at his toes, till, finding no assistance on the floor, he made a plunge and said huskily:

“Julius Cæsar.”

The odds are, however, that Palethorpe exaggerated; but he had no chance of exaggerating the sequel. This was nothing less than the immediate adjournment to the junk shop, which the bishop graciously said he would like to see.

Officially, the four of them set off; the Headmaster showing the way to their visitor, Mr. Eggett and his librarian in attendance. But unofficially and in fact the whole class went; for the hour had struck, and thus being released, they followed at a due and curious distance. And attaching to themselves sundry units *en route*, it was quite a respectable force which entered E classroom; tailed off at the very end by Benskin Minor, who kept jumping on tiptoe to catch a glimpse at the bishop.

As they reached the room and before they inspected the shelves, Bullock, by command, ex-

plained his system. "I have sub-divided the fiction," he said, "author by author. And I have labelled every book in every section with the name of its title and author outside. Like the *Pickwick Papers*, and underneath—er—*Shakespeare*."

"Just so," smiled the bishop.

"And—er—" said Bullock, racking his brains desperately, "—er—*Treasure Island*, and underneath *Charles Dickens*. Just like that, you know."

"Well, almost," said the bishop. "But what have we here?"

He was indicating the catalogue, on a small table.

"That's the catalogue, your lord, you know," thundered Bullock.

"Ah, I'll examine it presently," answered the bishop, and, taking it into his hand, he strode towards the bookshelves; his guides a few respectful paces behind.

The bishop adjusted his pince-nez to examine the shelves; all very precise, with no disorderly gaps, no books half tumbling; each volume spick and span in its new jacket.

Now, when the august visitor began his inspection—at first a casual and benevolent glance—he was nursing his coat tails in affable, easy pose. But they marked the coat tails drop and his whole body stiffen; and then he moved a couple of steps nearer; and so stood, very rigid, scanning book

after book. Next he moved to his left, where the poets reposed, and his eyes contracted queerly as he surveyed them. In the miscellaneous section, which he reached last, they distinctly heard him utter a strange exclamation.

His voice was somewhat cold when he summoned the Head; inviting him, it appeared, to remark some feature. But if the bishop's voice was cold, the Head's was colder when he, in turn, called up Mr. Eggett and Bullock. The temperature of the junk shop seemed positively to freeze.

"Bullock," demanded the Head, "what *does* this mean? Mr. Eggett, do *you* know anything of this?"

"Of what?" snapped Mr. Eggett, who had left his glasses behind and could therefore distinguish nothing in detail.

The Head indicated a couple of shelves which were headed POETRY.

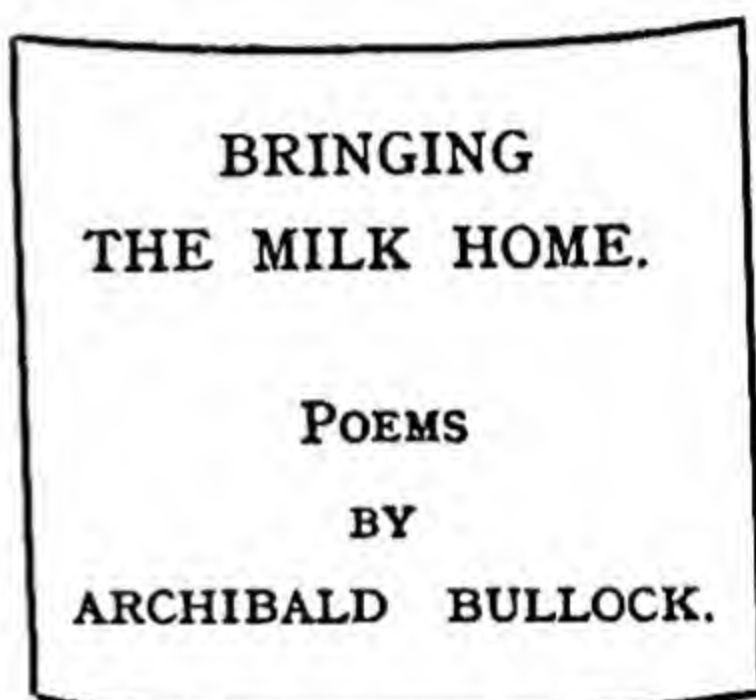
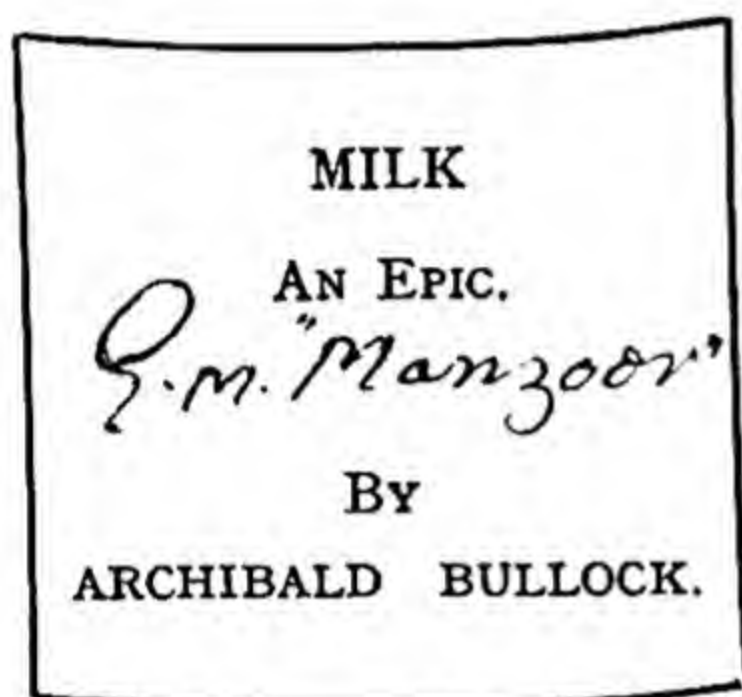
"And—er—of that?" the bishop seconded stiffly, pointing with his pince-nez to the FICTION department.

The four of them made an interesting picture. Bullock's face was a blend of anger and terror. He gaped, stupefied. The Head was white with annoyance. Mr. Eggett fingered his beard and peered helplessly. In the background the audience was tingling with delicious excitement. And the bishop stared nonplussed, like a man in a trance.

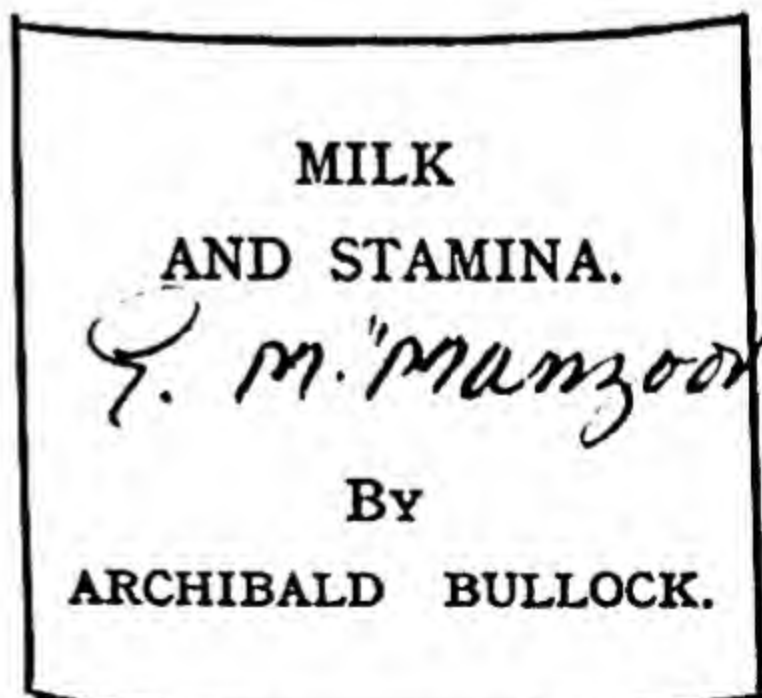
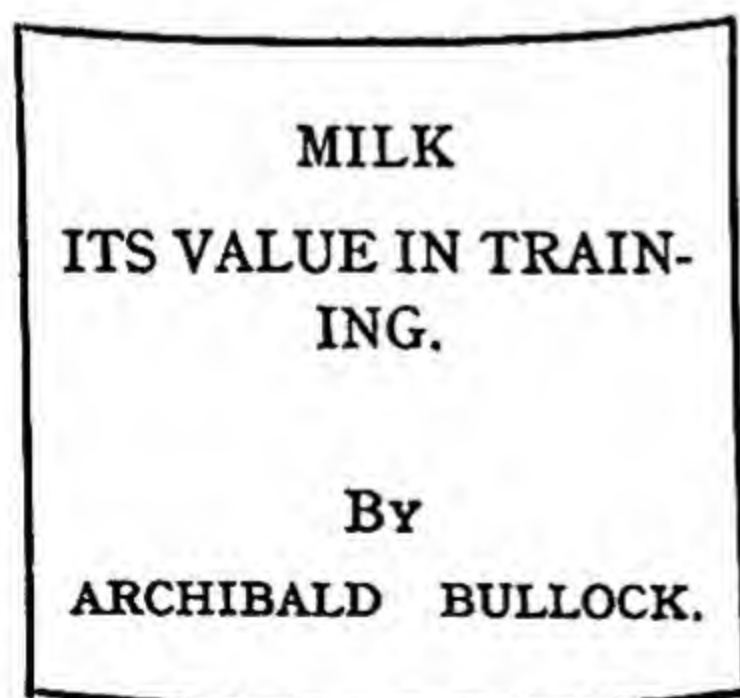
And yet what his lordship saw was clear enough.

It was plain as a pikestaff—a child could have made it out. The back of every book bore its neatly-typed label, and the only feature at all unusual was that all the books appeared to have been written by the same author and to deal with one and the same subject.

Thus (to take one or two specimens only) on the POETRY shelf the bishop was reading :



while the MISCELLANEOUS section displayed such classics as :



WHAT I OWE
TO
MILK.

By
ARCHIBALD BULLOCK.

MILK
DIETETIC PROPERTIES OF.

By
ARCHIBALD BULLOCK.

and, passing to fiction, it was found that *Archibald Bullock* had written those stirring tales:—*The Milky Way*, *The Morals of Milkmen*, *Milk and the Man* (a fantasy), and *Adventures With a Milk Pail*.

In brief, if the labels could be believed, every single book in the library dealt with the singularly fascinating subject of MILK, and had been written by the pen of Archibald Bullock.

If the labels could be believed? There was more than that! For when the bishop consulted the catalogue he found Bullock confirmed as the author of every book.

“A fertile writer indeed!” was his acrid comment.

But all the Head could gasp was, “What does it mean?”

One boy only in the room could have given him the answer. But he, emitting a shrill cackle like a hen’s, had dived, as the Head was speaking, for the door. Benskin Minor was off at full tilt to

his demi-god, to recount how Bullock's sins had found him out.

Sparrow's melancholy had gone. His face shone eagerly. Wistful hope irradiated every feature.

"Sir, I suppose," he was saying, "the Head is fearfully savage. Though of course I could never guess that the bish would blow in!"

"Sparrow," Mr. Eggett replied with a wince, "'blow in' is scarcely the term to apply to a bishop, nor is 'bish' an appropriate abbreviation. But, tell me. How did you manage that disgraceful substitution?"

"Sir, I'd planned it for the reopening, risking the off chance of Bullock looking in before. I had all my new labels and catalogue ready typed; and last night when the dorm was asleep I popped down and stuck them all on."

"Then you broke out of the dormitory at night?"

"Yes, sir," said Sparrow very promptly; "yes, sir."

"But whatever made you play such a trick on poor Bullock?"

Sparrow shrugged his shoulders. "Just an idea, sir."

"And what put milk into your head? Such a subject as milk?"

Again Sparrow gave a shrug, and when he continued it was in the tone of one changing the subject. "If I had been staying on, sir," he remarked,

"I should have asked for milk, sir. To build me up, sir. But it doesn't matter now I'm to be ex——"

"Caned," broke in Mr. Eggett. "Six strokes, Sparrow."

Chapter XII

Catching the Hare

SPARROW & CO.,
Ex TUCK SHOP SPECIALISTS & LIBRARIANS.
Self-Help Merchants.
Wrong Righters.

T. W. S. SPARROW,
Managing Director.

SPARROW was very pleased with his card when it was finished. He had borrowed the idea from his old acquaintance, Mr. Miggs, and had found a jobbing printer in the town, who had corrected his spelling and supplied him with fifty for three-and-sixpence; worth every penny, as he urged to his sleeping partner when the latter disputed the outlay on two grounds; one, that he had much better have lent it to a chap; two, that anyhow the firm had put up its shutters and retired from business. The first postulate was abolished after argument, but the second proved more difficult to dispute since Sparrow's barque seemed riding in quiet waters. But, as Sparrow

said, it is easier to mix a metaphor than to overthrow the established order of things, and as his affairs had established themselves in a sphere which he found repugnant and irked to exchange for the comfort of the domestic hearth, the firm of Sparrow & Co. must remain under arms, ready to strike a blow in Freedom's Cause.

The fact that Benskin was growing fatter than ever because Bullock had desisted from purloining his milk, formed no reason, Sparrow insisted, for dissolution. His partner must look ahead, take the long view. The one transaction in which the firm had engaged had been, he went on to show, a defensive transaction. The firm had punished Bullock—nothing more. But suppose Sparrow & Co. were minded to take the offensive. . . .

"Against whom?" demanded the junior partner. "Against Bullock? Bullock's a sleeping dog. Let Bullock lie!"

"The offensive," said Sparrow morosely, "against Things as They Are."

Willetts sniffed.

"And next," said Sparrow with briskness, "to secure a staff."

"There's lots of timber behind the penthouse," growled Willetts.

"An office staff. I have engaged Benskin Minor as office boy."

"And Eggett as chief clerk, I suppose!" sneered Willetts.

"No," said Sparrow thoughtfully, "not yet. Though I contemplate giving the Egg an interest in the firm."

"You needn't worry. He'll take an interest fast enough!"

"And of course we must advertise."

"We must—*what*?" shrieked Willett.

"Advertise, Willett. All decent firms advertise."

"Advertise where?"

"I was thinking," said Sparrow gently, "of the School magazine."

When Willett had recovered from his choking fit, Sparrow explained that the School magazine took advertisements and was "sticking out" as their medium. And pressed to state what form the advertisement would take, the senior partner, studying the card reflectively, remarked that they would insert that simple announcement; which, he added pleasantly, spoke for itself.

"But not for me!" cried Willett. "I retire!"

Disregarding a threat so ominous to the firm's welfare, Sparrow added that they would issue the advertisement forthwith, and when he had despatched the office boy for two shillings in stamps, he typed out and despatched his announcement.

"It will be," he said brightly, "the best old ad. they have had!"

"P'ff!" said Willett. "You don't think they'll put it in!"

"Well, we can only try. We can only try."

"When does the mag. come out?"

"A day or two before the paperchase."

"Well, I lay you they keep the money and tear up the ad."

"Very likely," sighed Sparrow.

Strange things happen. Perhaps the strangest in the history of *The Gate* was the appearance of Messrs. Sparrow & Co.'s advertisement. The editors, it was argued, must have jumped at it, not so much for the revenue it produced, as for the amusement it would create; the ray of brightness it diffused through the number. But whether the editors passed it in a moment of levity, or inserted it as a curiosity of literature, remains the fact that there it was for all to read! Mr. Eggett read it and smiled to himself. The junior Day Room read it and gravely inquired what Asylum Sparrow was qualifying for? Willett read it, in cold print, and quaked in his shoes.

And the Head read it.

The Head deemed it so singular that he sent for Sparrow. Having remarked that if there were any wrongs to be righted, the righting would be done by himself and not by Sparrow, he inquired what the announcement precisely meant? And eminently anxious to avoid any reference which might reflect upon anyone but himself, the Managing Director was compelled to fence as deftly as he could with this question.

“Speak out, boy! Do you know of any wrongs?”

Swift as his feathered namesake will swoop on its crumb, Sparrow now saw his chance and swooped upon it.

“Sir, in general, none,” he answered blandly. “But in particular——” He paused, with a wan smile.

“Well! In particular?”

“Sir, would you call an individual wronged if he was kept at school against his good? Supposing, sir, the school disagreed with him, and the air wasn’t healthy for his constitution, sir, and the drinking water had too much chalk in it, and his temperament, sir, required teaching at home?”

“Quite finished?” inquired the Head.

“No, sir. Suppose he wasn’t learning anything, sir. Wouldn’t you say, sir, that he was being wronged by being kept there, and that the school was wronging itself by keeping him?”

“Ah, a new argument,” the Head conceded. “The School wronging itself, eh? The School wronging itself by keeping a waster, what?”

“It seems so to me, sir,” sighed Sparrow.

The Head rose and stepped to his window, and came back again. He had his bomb to throw, but he wished to throw it as slowly as a bomb can possibly be thrown. He wanted to mark the effect as it left his hand and cleft its way through the air towards the head of its victim.

"I have concluded," he said at last, and very deliberately, "that Castlegate *will* be much better without you, Sparrow."

The dismal features brightened with swift surprise. And next the Head detected another expression which peeped an instant from Sparrow's eyes and was gone. Was his bombshell not so palatable after all? But this could hardly be, and Sparrow's reply abolished the fancy at once.

"Sir, when can I go?" he said eagerly.

"To-morrow, Sparrow. All the boys will be running in the paperchases, so you can slip off quietly after breakfast and no one will notice."

"I see, sir," said Sparrow.

"I am writing to prepare your father, but I shall not inform anyone else except Mr. Eggett. Until you have gone, the School will know nothing about it."

"I see, sir. Thank you, sir," repeated Sparrow.

II

Benskin Minor was growing extremely excited. He had never run before in a paperchase, and not being exactly what Bullock termed "fine drawn," he was not certain that he would enjoy it overmuch until he was landed safely and soundly at Motheby. There he meant to enjoy himself—while his money lasted.

For paperchase day at Castlegate is a real day of days. Mark it with reddest of red ink upon your calendar.

Except the cripples and invalids, everyone runs. The juniors have a pleasant little trot to Motheby, where they are free to refresh and enjoy themselves as they will, so long as they are back to Call Over at six. The senior run is a sterner affair altogether, but no less free and spacious at journey's end. You run the twelve odd miles to Fern Ash Bay; and, having arrived, assemble at Cope's, the confectioner; whereafter, and as soon as Cope is cleared out, you may tarry and amuse yourself until train time, or wend your way home by the path over the cliffs. There are two hares to lay the scent, and every year they leave the School gates at eleven o'clock to the tick.

Benskin Minor was consulting his demi-god ardently. Did Sparrow think a man ran better in jersey or zephyr, and ought he to take heaps of stamina-chocolate with him? What did a fellow do when he got the stitch? And ought he to nurse himself the first mile, or start off at a good lick and slow down afterwards?

Surveying his plump adherent with critical eyes, Sparrow was about to offer advice, when his door opened to admit the person of Palethorpe, who slipped inside and shut it again very swiftly. He looked nervous and sly and agitated.

"Sparrow," he said abruptly, "you know Bullock and I have been pals."

Sparrow looked at Benskin. "Attention!" he bade. His follower stood stiffly as a poker.

"Look here, Sparrow! Can't you hoof that kid out?"

"Well, that depends," said Sparrow. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you privately. I do really."

At a signal from the Managing Director, the office boy withdrew and Palethorpe resumed.

"Now, Sparrow," he said, "what does that fool ad. of yours mean?"

"It means just what it says," retorted Sparrow.

He looked extremely composed and pleased with himself. His typewriter was missing from its place by the window and one or two photographs had gone from the wall, but otherwise there was nothing in his surroundings to convey the slightest hint that after to-day his study would know its occupant no more. Nor was there anything in Sparrow's air to indicate any excitement or departure from routine, or to suggest that after breakfast to-morrow morning, ere hounds and hares were thrilling to get away, one ostracised being would shake the School dust from his feet and slip off to the station for the last time.

For Sparrow had said nothing to anybody. Even Willett had no idea, nor the faithful Benskin. Indeed, the only fly in the latter's amber was regret that he would be flogging along with the juniors instead of trotting at his idol's heels to Fern Ash.

Presently Sparrow was going to say good-bye

to the Egg, but for the moment he was all attention to business. Palethorpe's manner kindled his curiosity.

"Yes," he repeated, "it means exactly what it says."

"I thought it did," Palethorpe answered, smiling cunningly. "Well, look here, Sparrow, you profess that you'll right wrongs?"

Sparrow nodded.

"Very well. You don't funk anything, Sparrow. I want you to right a wrong for me? Will you?"

"It depends what it is," quoth Sparrow in his best manner.

Palethorpe dropped his voice to a cautious whisper. "It's Bullock," he murmured. "He's served me a dirty trick."

"Proceed, please," bade Sparrow, feeling a moment's pang that his partner was not present to see how the Head of the firm conducted business.

"Yes. It was arranged that I should be one of the hares to-morrow. I was looking forward, Sparrow, to being one of the hares."

"Quite. They reach Cope's first and get the pick of the grub."

"Oh, blow the grub," said Palethorpe, "it's the honour. Besides, I've been working out a lot of new tracks. If you take the wood, for instance, by Towler's farm——"

"Please keep to the point," commanded the man of affairs.

"Well, this is the point. Bullock's bagged my place as one of the hares. He's fixed it so that I'm stood down in his favour. And he kept it dark from me till he'd got it fixed. I say I've a grievance, Sparrow; Bullock's a beast."

"Well?"

"Well! A grievance is a wrong. And I want you to right it."

"I see," sighed Sparrow, using his pet expression. "You want Sparrow & Co. to take your business in hand. Do you want Sparrow & Co. to stop Bullock from being a hare?"

"No," Palethorpe whispered eagerly, "I don't. I've a much niftier notion than that for righting my wrong. But I can't carry it out by myself. So I've come to you."

"Obviously," said Sparrow. "What is it, Palethorpe?"

"I want to catch Bullock!"

Sparrow opened his eyes, which began to glisten. To catch the hare! Yes, that *was* a notion indeed. The hares were never caught at the paperchase. For one thing, they were given too long a start; for another, they were usually the best runners; and, finally, woe betide the wight who should catch them!

"Yes," he said slowly, "yes. There's something in that!"

"There's everything!" cried Palethorpe, forgetting to whisper. "A bit of a come-down for

Bullock to be caught. And to be caught by the man whom he's swizzled from being a hare. I guess it's a good revenge, Sparrow! What, old son?"

Such intimate cordiality was novel from Palethorpe, but the Managing Director let it pass. He could quite excuse Palethorpe being swept off his feet by the project! It enthused him too. What a jolt for the Bull—if he hadn't been leaving!

But, anyhow, it was rather good fun pumping Palethorpe.

"Well, how do you propose to manage it?"

"Very simply," leered Palethorpe. "I told you I knew some new cuts. Well, I've been shamming to Bullock that I don't mind in the least, and I've told him that tippy dodge by Towler's farm. As a rule, the hares always branch off across the plough there. But if you double instead into that bit of a wood, you know——"

"Yes," put in Sparrow. "I know."

"Well, you save half a mile, and you can fog the scent a bit. I've explained that to Bullock, and he's going to do it. But I haven't told him that I know another short cut to Towler's." Palethorpe emphasized with raised forefinger. "I haven't told him *that*. What I'm going to do is to drop out and slither through that short cut into the wood beyond Towler's—you know, on the left, past the stream?"

"Yes, I understand."

"And I'll lurk ahead there till Bullock comes ; then I'll catch him."

"But you can't spring out on him. That wouldn't be catching, as he'd know that you'd got ahead by not following the scent !"

"Precisely," Palethorpe agreed. "That's where *you* come in. You'll take the cut, too, by yourself and be lurking about. We mustn't go together or we might be spotted. When Bullock comes up you'll sham that you've sprained your ankle. You'll be in terrible pain——"

"Yes. Thank you," said Sparrow.

"You'll cry to Bullock for help. He'll have to stop. You'll confess that you hadn't followed the scent but were trying to get to Fern Ash in front of the hares ; and you know, Sparrow, if you don't mind my saying so, you're such a rum chap it's just the dodge he'd believe of you. Then you'll be in such agony, he'll have to stop to help you ; besides, of course he'll think he has plenty in hand. And while you're keeping him, and groaning, and so on, I shall come steaming up and catch him with a swoop."

"Very pretty," said Sparrow. "Very pretty. You'll come steaming up and catch him with a swoop ?"

"That's the idea," said Palethorpe.

"That's all right. Yes, I'd back myself to delay him. But what about the other hare all the time ?"

“Leave him to me,” said Palethorpe mysteriously.

The Managing Director shook his head. “Oh, no,” he replied. “You must tell me how you will deal with the other hare?”

Palethorpe crept very close. “In confidence, Sparrow?”

“Of course,” agreed Sparrow.

“Tredgold is to be the other hare. And as Tred agrees with me that it’s dirty of Bullock, he’s going to drop out first with a thorn in his foot, so as not to be left to look after you or to be on the scene when I swoop down on Bullock. You see the idea? Bullock’s caught, and I bust up the show. All the more disgrace to Bullock! Do you follow?”

“Right on your heels,” said Sparrow; and mused for a while.

Yes, the idea seemed sound. It seemed very sound. Very neatly worked out; and a tidy jar for the Bull, the supplanter—if only he hadn’t been leaving the School beforehand!

That was where the shoe pinched. But he couldn’t tell Palethorpe. How assert to Palethorpe that his advertisement meant what it said and decline next moment so bright a commission? No, Sparrow & Co. would not haul their flag down yet. Sparrow & Co. would go down with their colours still flying!

“Well, Palethorpe,” he said at length, “I’ll

give you no promise. I must—er—think it over, you know. You shall know to-morrow."

"What time to-morrow?"

"In time enough," replied Sparrow, fondling his chin and eyeing Palethorpe with reflective, subtle amusement. "But mark this! If you don't see me before the start, squeeze away all the same to do your share. Look out for mine when the time comes. Can I say more?"

Palethorpe smiled broadly. "Cautious man, Sparrow!" he purred. "No promises, eh? But trust me to understand. I know what a lot you'd give to score the Bull off."

And Sparrow smiled back, but not quite for the same reason. He had just visualized a picture not undiverting. The picture of Palethorpe, waiting to steam up with his swoop while Sparrow & Co. were half-way home in the train! Palethorpe waiting and waiting, and going on waiting!

"Well, you know, you can't be too careful, Palethorpe," he said.

"No," agreed Palethorpe, looking more cunning than ever. And, after a peer down the passage, he slipped slyly out.

He might have felt a trifle less delighted had he followed Sparrow presently to Mr. Eggett, and overheard the conversation which passed.

Wise men do not linger over adieux. And Mr. Eggett, so sorely vexed with his malady that life appeared very drab and scarcely worth living,

cast on Sparrow a glance which may, or may not, have concealed the pleasure he felt at being rid of him. The man whom the fly has tormented rejoices to squash it. Mr. Eggett looked like a man who sees his fly squashed, but is not very sure how he feels about it. He made a great fuss of measuring and mixing his medicine.

"So, Sparrow," he said when he had got the dose to his liking. "So at last you've actually got your own way, Sparrow!"

"Yes, sir," Sparrow assented, after a pause.

Mr. Eggett took the cork from his bottle and smelled it. "Dear, dear, this smells very strong . . . there, good-bye, Sparrow."

"Until I come down, sir, as an Old Boy," smiled Sparrow.

"A little unorthodox, eh? For a lad expelled?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Sparrow indignantly. "I never was orthodox."

"No," sighed Mr. Eggett, with his first smile. "Well, I trust you'll—er—keep up your golf. And don't forget your proficiency with the typewriter."

"Sir, I shall write to you on it," said Sparrow at once.

Mr. Eggett drained his glass with a wry grimace. Then he began to poke among his papers until he found a little parcel in white, crinkly paper. He gave it to Sparrow.

“Er, a wrist watch, Sparrow,” he stammered uncomfortably. “There, there! Good-bye!”

III

“Buck up, ill-nourished One! What’s the matter with you?”

Benskin Minor pulled a face at his zephyr, and gave his running shorts a disdainful pat. “Sparrow,” he answered, “I—er—I wish I was running with you!”

“Oh, do you. But you run with the kids tomorrow.”

“Yes, and I’ll get the stitch, I know I will.”

“Well, you little goat, it’s worse to Fern Ash.”

“But I wouldn’t get stitch with you,” said Benskin confidently. “I bet you I could keep up, Sparrow. I know I could.”

With Willett Sparrow could part with all equanimity. The five-and-twopence owed by his sleeping partner must be written off as a bad debt—that was all. Willett was too fish-like to stir emotion; a casual nod would serve to take leave of him. But this fat little tub, this plump and pally and most loyal of Benskins, had somehow wriggled himself to another plane. To go without saying good-bye to Benskin would make one feel funny.

And musing thus, Sparrow suddenly saw the whole scheme. It flooded his bewilderment like a searchlight. Benskin should slip off from the

Motheby toddle and they'd spend a final hour or two together. They'd feast like kings, and he'd catch a later train. No difficulty there, for the Head knew that he was so keen to go that he was to be left to make his own way down to the station. Yes, they'd have a rag! Fat Benskin and himself!

Then Sparrow started, and his eyes grew dreamy in thought. A rag in the town? No, he knew a scheme better than that!

Benskin and he would have a last rag in the woods. They'd hide and watch the chaps in the paperchase. Yes, by Jove, they'd hide for Bullock and Palethorpe. They'd have some sport and witness the whole caboodlum, and then he'd pack Benskin back, and depart for the station.

"Fattest One," he said smoothly, "listen to me. You can cut the junior run if you like, very easily. Start with them, fall behind, and then slip across, and if you come to Towler's farm I'll be waiting for you. There's no difficulty, as the junior run starts first. You and I will have a rag in the woods."

While Benskin Minor's face was shining with joy, Sparrow gave him more explicit directions; and the infant went straight off to the seventh heaven. What old paperchase equalled a day in the woods with Sparrow! Besides, he'd known all the time that his stitch would floor him!

It was not until the junior chase had gone off

and the senior was about to start, that Willett looked round for his partner and found him not. He had spoken to him for a moment just after breakfast, when Sparrow, saying he had one or two things to attend to, had murmured, "So long, old man," and toddled away. He had run after him, to inquire solicitously whether the firm of Sparrow & Co. had enough funds in hand to ensure appropriate celebrations at Fern Ash, and had been informed that he need not worry himself. Palethorpe, too, had come and inquired for Sparrow, but wouldn't say what he wanted, and had gone off smiling. Well, he supposed old Sparrow would trot out in a sec. Meanwhile, here came the hares, about to start.

Bullock came first, very proud of the badge on his breast, and carrying two enormous bags of paper. They were the biggest bagfuls that any remembered. In his wake appeared Tredgold, very tall and angular. Mr. Eggett, watch in hand, was waiting to start them. And the hounds stood round in sweaters and blazers, toe-dancing now and again to keep themselves warm.

"They're off!"

And off they were, as eleven chimed from the cloisters; Bullock with a swinging, easy lope, and Tredgold well on his toes, stepping daintily. They took the bend by the road-pond and so out of view, as the first scatter of paper fluttered behind them. Of the hounds, meanwhile, who

must curb their impatience, none more full of gay quips and jesting than Palethorpe ; and none so restless as Willett, who nosed from group to group in quest of Sparrow. But Sparrow must be here in a second. Of course.

Then Willett went to the starter, who studied his watch.

“ Have you seen Sparrow, sir ? ”

“ Sparrow ! ” said Mr. Eggett, a little queerly. “ Ah, Sparrow ? Er—he’s somewhere about, I suppose.”

“ I can’t see him, sir,” replied Willett.

“ Well, get ready, you boys ! ”

At the warning they peeled wraps and coverings, and lined across the road, three ranks of them. They were off to a lively cheer from the Head and his staff, who had gathered, as usual, to watch the scene at the start.

The morning was very beautiful and exhilarating, and Bullock, jogging steadily on with his partner, had never felt in finer or livelier fettle. He could have sung for sheer enjoyment, but he wanted his breath. He was minded to make a record time of this run, and presently he began to explain to Tredgold the two or three new cuts of which Palethorpe had told him. “ Tred,” he jerked, now his second wind had come freely, “ they’ve always gone before by the same route. To-day we’ll set them a twister. Pick up your feet, man ! ”

Tredgold seemed a little glum and preoccupied ;

he trotted at Bullock's side without much zest, and more than once he appeared to be faltering. But it was not until they had passed Blackbird Hill, and were crossing the Common this side of Oglethorpe, that suddenly he declared for a breather, and stopped. Bullock thought he looked particularly sheepish, till he spoke.

"Bullock, you carry on! I'll limp to those cottages. I guess I've strained my foot or done something to it."

"Rot!" grunted Bullock.

"Rot be hanged!" snapped Tredgold, averting his face. "I must chuck it."

Bullock had little time to waste upon sympathy. "Hand us your scent bags," he growled. "What a goat you are! You shouldn't have started if you feared breaking down!"

"Is it likely?" Tredgold rejoined, with an odd laugh.

"So long, then!" said Bullock.

Off he went by himself, four bags on his shoulders, glorying in his vigour and splendid condition. He gave a thought to Palethorpe, the futile Palethorpe; lucky for Pale he wasn't in his shoes now. Pale would have found it too much of a job to do Tredgold's work as well as his own for the rest of the way, and finish as fresh as paint—as he meant to do!

So having scattered a generous dose of false scent by the turnpike, and darted across to the hedge to fling over more, he vaulted a five-barred

gate, and, running some yards, spread a lavish false trail that led to nowhere. Then he doubled back to Towler's to plunge into the wood. He was laughing to himself as he broke through the undergrowth and a rabbit rose from its form and whisked away.

On he went, brushing branches and bushes aside, not down the bridle-path but cutting straight through, till the little stream gleamed in his path, of which Palethorpe had spoken. Yes, this was it ; he must cross it and turn sharp left ; over the meadow and into the wood again, which would bring him out half a mile above Merry's barn. The stream ran purling and sparkling : a mere whiplash of water ; he would take it in his stride, and over he went. As he landed, the soil on the other bank crumbled beneath him ; but he recovered himself with a jerk and scrambled to his feet.

Then he made a discovery.

The pain revealed it at once ; the sharp, urgent stinging. He set his teeth and squared his truculent jaw, and hobbled across the meadow ; but he knew he was done. Too late to upbraid himself for an utter ass—an ass who should have remembered his footer knee, and taken the stream carefully, not leaped it.

In scrambling up from his slip, he had twisted the ligament which he had twisted so badly on the Rugger field.

The pain was intense, but he hobbled gallantly on ; at any rate, he would gain the shelter of the wood. Perhaps he could patch himself up there, could tie something round it. Each step a torture, he managed it gamely and bravely, till at last he had fallen full length in the undergrowth. He clawed at the soil with his hands and groaned heavily.

The bushes parted, and two faces peered at him. Then he raised his head and saw two figures advancing ; one very much like a tub in shorts and zephyr ; the other attired in " firsts " or, in other words, the attire donned by the School on Sundays and feast days. The round little tub was soon resolved into Benskin, whose companion, treading softly, appeared to be Sparrow.

" Hi ! Sparrow ! " roared Bullock.

Bullock should have looked red and hot from his run ; and hot enough he did look, but his face was quite pale. " Get me some water ? " he gasped, and while Benskin fled streamwards, he told Sparrow what had happened and how Tredgold had dropped out. " So you see," he groaned, " what a plight we're in ! No hares ! The paperchase is let down ! "

Sparrow was on his knees, attempting a bandage.

" And *I* have let them down ! " persisted Bullock. He banged his head with his hands in his mortification.

" Jolly bad luck," murmured Sparrow. " That's worse than your mountain."

"I'll never hear the end of it! I'll never get over it! *I* to let the School down, Sparrow! Ugh—ugh—you're hurting."

"There, easy, old Bull! Here comes Benskin with water."

E. M. Manzoor

"So you understand, Eggett," the Head was saying as, having driven across in the latter's car, they waited at the end of the sea-wall to catch the first glimpse of the hares cantering in, "you understand I had no alternative. The poor lad told me frankly that he was doing the School no good!"

"Yes, yes," murmured Mr. Eggett, "I understand."

"So I had no alternative. Although I grant you, Eggett, that I sent him off rather suddenly, drastically. But if a boy has to go, let him go instanter. It's easier for all parties. Don't you agree?"

"Quite," remarked Mr. Eggett, without conviction.

"So now he's in the train, the misguided child!"

"Yes, now," sighed Mr. Eggett, "he'll be in the train."

He took his glasses off and wiped them reflectively. "Don't you think," he observed, as one who would change the subject, "that we'd see better if we moved a few yards higher up?"

"Yes, it's time the hares arrived," the Head replied, as they moved. "It's time they were coming. Trust Bullock to set a good pace."

Mr. Eggett was craning his neck. "Hullo! There's one of them!"

The Head craned too. "Yes, that will be Bullock," he said. "By himself though! Tredgold must have dropped out."

"Funny, isn't it, how small Bullock looks from here!"

"But he's moving!" exclaimed the Head. "My word, he's moving!" He took a few steps forward. "By Jove, it's a race!"

"No. That fellow in the rear is Tredgold, surely?"

Both of them were growing most excited. It was clear that the leading runner, drawing within range, was sprinting for all he was worth, and that the figure behind him raced in pursuit. Then they fancied the latter was shouting—or was it the wind?

"I do believe," said the Head at last, "that man's trying to catch Bullock!"

"But Tredgold wouldn't be trying to catch Bullock?"

"Tredgold or not, they're racing. . . . Yes . . . he's trying to catch him!"

Mr. Eggett removed his glasses and wiped them once more with fingers that were trembling with excitement. If that first figure was Bullock's,

well, Bullock's it was; but, somehow, it seemed to him too small for Bullock.

"What a race!" the Head was ejaculating. "What a fine finish!"

"They'll be here," Mr. Eggett gasped, "in a moment or two."

"Where's the end, Eggett?"

"Just exactly where we are standing, sir."

Then the Head began to cheer them in his delight. "Bullock!" he shrieked. "Bullock! One more sprint, Bullock!"

For now it had become as plain as daylight that the second of the two runners was trying to catch the first, who was fleeing like a man who fled for his life. Next they could make out the empty bags at his sides, flopping and flapping; and somehow it seemed as if they were four bags, not two. "An odd effect of the light," murmured Mr. Eggett.

"It's a hare right enough," cried the Head. "But is it Bullock?"

"Not hefty enough," Mr. Eggett said, faintly and queerly.

"And it is not Tredgold!"

"Not tall enough," said Mr. Eggett, more queerly.

"It's somebody, Eggett, whose togs are too short for him. I can distinguish that. They're too short altogether."

"But they flop," said Mr. Eggett, peering acutely. "Too short in the leg, but too big in

circumference. They look as if they'd been taken from a shorter boy, very much fatter."

"What a race!" glowed the Head.

Then Mr. Eggett removed his glasses for the third time, and snapping them into their case, whispered faintly:

"It's Sparrow!"

Barely had the whisper left his lips, when the leader, arms and legs working desperately, flung himself across the imaginary tape a good twenty yards ahead of his savage pursuer; whose face made a wonderful picture of fury foiled.

"You traitor!" Palethorpe fumed, when he got his breath.

"So you see, sir," Sparrow lisped to the Head that evening, for now it was far too late to be travelling home, "what could I do, sir? Bullock was knocked out. And somebody had to lay the scent for the chase."

"Indeed!" drawled the Head.

"Besides, it would have been so rough, sir, on Bullock. The paperchase breaking down would have been his fault."

"Sparrow," observed the Head, and his tone was like ice, "this is more serious; more grave than I can express. I wired to your father from Fern Ash not to expect you after all *to-day*. But to-morrow, Sparrow——"

"Yes, sir?" Sparrow put in. "To-morrow, sir?"

"You will come to me immediately after breakfast."

And Sparrow went forth ; to keep out of Palethorpe's way.

Chapter XIII

Bad Pennies

"**B**UT what shall *I* do," whined Willett, "when you have gone?"

"Find some one else to tap, I suppose," rejoined Sparrow.

"Is it absolutely final?"

"If it wasn't, would I be up here!" And Sparrow made a gesture embracing the sickroom which, since the San was built, is rarely tenanted save by such rare and hapless transgressors as disciplinary measures may require to segregate. He showed Willett some initials scratched on the fireplace. "Tubby Spalding cut these," he said, "when *he* was expelled. And here," he added, "are mine. They are neater than Tubby's."

Willett drew near and inspected the monogram which was to be all that survived of his friend at Castlegate. He had come by permission for the purpose of saying farewell, and although he had now uttered it several times over, he was fidgeting about and seemed loth to withdraw.

"I say? Have they given you any leaving money?" he asked presently.

"Yes. But nothing doing," said Sparrow firmly.

"But suppose I told you how to make the Head change his mind? Then you wouldn't want it, and could lend a chap——"

"The Head wrote to my father this morning, and told him to meet my train to-morrow at the other end. And Eggett himself has to put me in the train at this end."

Willett waxed eager. "That doesn't matter!" he cried. "If a chap falls into the river, and you jump in and save his life, the Head will say you're a hero, and won't expel you!"

"Can't see any signs of a river up here," murmured Sparrow.

"No. But I'll smuggle you out!"

"And who'd fall in the river?"

"We could shove young Benskin in," said Willett thoughtfully.

"And I can't swim, Willett."

"That makes no difference. Benskin's so fat, he would float. But wait a minute! I've got a better tip. I'm good at mechanics, and I'll monkey with the Head's car. Then it will run away when he's going top speed and just as he's dashing his brains out you'll spring up and save him! He couldn't expel you after that, Sparrow; could he?"

"Willett," said Sparrow, turning to take up his book, "you needn't bother to send on that five-and-twopence you owe me."

But Willett, who had been nourishing the de-

lusion that his parting friend had forgotten all about it, was already slipping out of the room.

And just as quietly did Sparrow slip off from Castlegate. He went like no comet blazing a trail of glory, but, as silently as the snowflake, he melted away. For the School was still at breakfast when Mr. Eggett, groaning under the pangs of his indigestion which had returned with a virulence quite unparalleled, popped him and his box into a cab, and bade him take a last look at the scene of his sufferings. Who knows whether vanity or sentiment inspired Sparrow's last act? Whichever it was, when he caught sight outside the station of that local celebrity (so well known to Old Boys) who pursues the calling of shoe-black when not in gaol, he insisted on having his boots shined for the last time! Having tendered a shilling and received six coppers in change, he bestowed three of these and his blessing upon Balmy Bill, and stalked off into the station to the bookstall.

Here he made his purchase and tendered the other three pennies, at which the stall attendant glanced and declined with thanks. "They're French 'uns!" he laughed. "They're bad 'uns for our purposes."

Out again rushed Sparrow, but all he could see of the traitor was the boot-box bump-bumping upon his retreating shoulders.

Remarking that he would make the ruffian

refund, Mr. Eggett volunteered to exchange the pennies. But Sparrow declared he would keep them as a memento.

Mr. Eggett pursed his lips as the train steamed in. "You'll have plenty enough to remember Castlegate by. Sparrow, I scarcely think you'll forget Castlegate."

And a smile had stolen to Sparrow's melancholy features when he leaned from the carriage window, and answered :

"No, never, sir."

He had gone. His place knew him no more. Mr. Eggett watched the train disappear round the curve ; then, heaving a little sigh, trudged slowly back. His malady was indeed very troublesome this morning.

Now with Sparrow's departure a great peace pervaded Bullock. Removed by special request from the post of librarian, and debarred by his strained ligament from so much as even thinking of football, though, happily, not prevented from getting about, he looked around for a new interest in life ; and the sight of the over-fed Benskin suggested one. To put Benskin Minor and a few other youngsters into training would be a truly public-spirited notion.

So, seconded by Palethorpe, with whom he had made it up, he selected six ripe candidates, and addressed them :

"You kids are slacksters," he thundered.

“ You’ve got to train. You’ll always be useless at footer until you train.” He pulled forth Willett, whom he had lined at their head. “ Willett’s in charge of this squad. You are going to start runs.”

They withered beneath his frown. “ Yes, Bullock,” they said.

“ Then see you do it,” he growled. “ Or I shall flay Willett.”

On the following morning Bullock drew Palethorpe aside. “ I’ve something to show you, Pale,” he said awkwardly. “ But I don’t want you to tell anyone else, because—well, it comes from my Cousin Laura ; and I was a bit—er—ragged about her, you remember.”

“ Yes, old man,” murmured Palethorpe, hiding a smile.

“ So I keep her dark,” growled Bullock. “ You understand. She crosses back to-day to America ; and what do you think she’s sent me as a parting present ? ”

“ An American eagle for the museum ? ”

“ No,” said Bullock gruffly. “ Six dozen eggs ! Six dozen new-laid eggs, to keep my strength up. But how can I eat the lot before they go bad ! ”

“ Well, you can give them away,” said Palethorpe blandly.

“ Give them away ! With new-laid eggs at three-pence each ! Do you think I’m mad, or a millionaire ! ” And, roaring thus, Bullock limped up

and down the study. "Give them away!" he repeated. "Pale, you're an idiot!"

"Well, why not——"

Bullock cut him short with a gleeful shout.

"I've got it!" he shouted.

Immediately after dinner he summoned Willett and bade him fetch along the training squad. Whom, when they were numbered off, he addressed again:

"How much have you spent on chocolate this week, Benskin?"

"Please, not a sou," bleated Benskin, his fingers behind his back tightening upon a toothsome wedge of pork pie.

"Well, listen, you little loafers! You can't train and suck sweets. Half the secret of training is diet. Eh, Palethorpe?"

His confederate's answer was a sagacious nod.

"And eggs, you flabby young worms, are the best diet. You want to train on the yolk of an egg, taken raw. Some of you are too fat and some are too scraggy. Eggs will correct all that, give you brawn and muscle. Palethorpe, old man, won't eggs give them brawn and muscle?"

"That's a cert.," rejoined Palethorpe.

"So instead of wasting your money on sweets, my beauties, each of you will invest in a dozen fresh eggs. And you'll take the yolks of a couple a day. That, you understand, is six days' supply; and you'll keep them by you."

"They are run out of eggs in tucker," said Willett at once.

"P'ff! What does that matter," said Bullock, squaring his jaw but making a mighty effort to look benevolent. "I've taken the trouble to procure some real fresh ones for you. You shall have them for fourpence each. Corporal Willett, collect the money!"

But Benskin hung back. "Please!" he said bleakly. "I hate eggs!"

"Then you," retorted their trainer, "will take eighteen . . . Is this the right money, Corporal? Distribute the eggs!"

This masterly piece of philanthropy thus briskly completed, the squad was dismissed with a gruff command not to talk—"for, of course, I can't supply the whole School with eggs!"—and Benskin, having put his eighteen away, found himself waylaid by an amiable Willett, who seemed eager to fill the gap that Sparrow had left.

"Bensky, old man," he invited, "are you coming for a walk?"

Benskin shook his head and looked confused.

"Oh, come on!" pressed Willett.

"I'm busy" stammered Benskin, very uncomfortably. "I've got—er—to train."

"Not you! You did your half dozen laps this morning. Don't rot. We'll go for a walk."

"But I'm not rotting, Willett. I've got—to write letters."

"I never saw you writing one yet, you porpoise!"

And off went Willett in high dudgeon with his repulse. It wasn't as if he owed the kid anything. He hadn't started cultivating him yet. But now that Sparrow was gone . . .

Willett came to himself with a start as Bullock limped up, and having learned that the eggs had been stowed away and tweaked his Corporal's ear, passed on with a chuckle. He had been bidden to use his knee as much as he could, and was off now for a gentle meander with Palethorpe.

Rounding the water tower into Hay Wood, the cronies emerged at the stile by Abel's meadows, and these they crossed and arrived at the wire netting which surrounds the area devoted to poultry farming. They skirted the netting, giving it a wide berth; for this alone of Farmer Abel's land was rigorously out of bounds to the School. Ahead, and on the further side of the poultry farm, Little Hay Common was flaming with golden gorse; dipping sharply on the West to the Infant Schools where once the village children had learned their pot-hooks. But since the Council built their new schools at Topham, thither the toddlers of Hay repair with their satchels; so that their Temple of Knowledge is derelict now, and the cottage for the Schoolmistress, which abuts it, is scarcely more than a leaking and tumble-down shell.

On the brink of the Common the two were resting when they were accosted by a man who seemed upset. Pointing to the caps which betrayed their origin, he imparted, without waste of time on a preface, his intention of "learning them" to steal his eggs. This brought them to their feet bewildered and gaping.

Recognising him at once as Mr. Abel himself, and not failing to take note of the ash-plant he carried, Bullock denied in explicit terms that they had been "anywhere near his rotten eggs." Mr. Abel disregarded this slight on his produce, and after looking Bullock up and down with a comment for his game leg, turned his attention to Palethorpe, observing :

"You git !"

"But, my good man——"

"Git !" repeated the farmer, and, raising his stick, he applied it with a flick to Palethorpe's calves. "I'll see you off my property before I lose sight of you. Come—up !" He might have been adjuring a lagging horse.

"The Common," said Bullock truculently, "doesn't belong to you."

"No. But my eggs does. Come—*up* !"

As Mr. Abel's stick had so easily the best of the argument, dignity counselled retreat ; but as Bullock could only limp, Palethorpe made a virtue of sticking to his friend, and the trio returned as the two had come. The only difference

was that every now and then, Mr. Abel, whose temper was certainly strained, gave Palethorpe a larrop and repeated his strange intention regarding the form of instruction he was imparting. By the time they had regained the water tower, Palethorpe's legs were smarting from thigh to heel, and Bullock was praying that he would never hear the word "eggs" again.

But all the time the Fates were ordaining otherwise. He and the School were to hear quite a lot about eggs, and that no later than the following day, when the Head, having summoned them into Big School, stated that he had received a serious complaint. "Our good friend Mr. Abel," said the Head, "allows you boys very generously the run of his land. You are only excluded from the portions enclosed for poultry."

Every ear was pricked with lively amusement.

"It appears that boys have been abusing his generosity. Farmer Abel has begun to miss eggs. He is quite convinced that one of you boys has taken them. So all Mr. Abel's land is now out of bounds." He turned to the School prefects. "You understand?"

He had paused, and they were expecting permission to rise, when the last words came on a note of extreme amazement:

"But why eggs? Why should you want to steal eggs? Surely boys who want eggs can buy them

in the tuck-shop? Why pilfer *eggs*? Can anyone tell me?"

Benskin blanched. He believed that the Head's eye, which was roving the room, sought him. Very stealthily he drew his hand from his pocket which hid his day's egg ration waiting devouring. But no one rose, and probably no one detected the covert glances cast in Bullock's direction by the training squad. Palethorpe stirred uneasily in his seat and glanced at Bullock suspiciously under his eyelids. But Bullock sat like a rock and fingered his waistcoats.

"Well," said the Head, "you can go. But remember what I have said." And with a nod to Mr. Eggett, he strode out grimly.

Why eggs? How the words rang in Bullock's ears, to fill him with the sickliest apprehension! It was obvious enough . . . but why dwell upon it . . . the mischief had been done now. And the Head had said his say out.

II

It was two days afterwards, while the School was at dinner, that Mr. Abel arrived on the scene in person and asked for the Head, whom he found at the end of his lunch. This time the farmer was not outwardly fuming, but almost voiceless with concentrated and bottled-up rage. As soon as Mrs. Games and her daughter had withdrawn, and the Head had proffered a glass of wine, gruffly de-

clined, Mr. Abel took position upon the hearthrug and, spreading his columns of legs, thundered:

"What does my hens lay?"

The Head, who meant to give him time to cool down, folded his table-napkin without a word.

"Mr. Games," repeated his visitor, "what does my hens lay?"

The Head smiled pleasantly. "Is this a conundrum, Mr. Abel?"

"I asks you for the third time. What does my hens lay?"

"Eggs, I assume," said the Head, in his smoothest tones.

"Then you're wrong!" his visitor cried and, striding forward, he placed three small circular objects on the white tablecloth. "My hens," he stuttered, "has taken to laying *them*!"

"But these," the Head exclaimed with a glance, "are pennies!"

"And French 'uns at that!"

The Head was turning them over and over in his hand. His eyes were incredulous, his whole figure seemed to protest.

"Listen, Mr. Games, and see what you make of it. I've three prize hens sitting in a 'enhouse by themselves. At least I 'ad three. Now I've got nobbut two!"

"Indeed!" said the Head politely. "Then you have killed one?"

“ Kill ’em ! Them’s champion ’ens ! ” retorted Mr. Abel, whose aspirates suffered as his excitement increased. “ Last night when I went my round, one of them three had gone. But in its nest I found a bloomin’ French penny ! ”

“ You astonish me ! ” said the Head. As indeed he did.

“ I’m not through yet. I lifted off the other two ’ens for a look. In the morning each of them ’ens had been sitting on an egg. But, blow me, if each wasn’t sitting now on a penny ! ”

“ And you say the pennies were French ? ”

“ All three of ’un—French. There they are, sir ! ”

“ May I keep them for a while ? ”

“ Keep ’en an’ welcome, but find out who prigged my prize ’en ! A yellow ’en she was. First Prize at Bath Show ! ” And off stumped Mr. Abel, purple with wrath.

Although the Head found it very hard to believe that anyone in the School had committed this outrage, he summoned Mr. Eggett, that Nestor in counsel, who, wrapped in a jaundiced gloom and suffering severely, declared with a groan that Castlegate had gone mad. And once again the School was marshalled, and after learning briefly what had occurred, was allowed two hours to unearth the transgressor. It was given just two hours to deliver to justice the despoiler of its fair fame and chicken runs. No one, in

the meantime, must leave the School quarters.

"Further," the Head concluded emphatically, "I warn you all that I must remove temptation. I remove temptation by removing eggs altogether. I will have no more of them in the tuckshop, and any boy found with one will be dealt with severely. I don't care a rap how honestly he has come by it. From this instant eggs are forbidden. Understand that!"

Bullock acted the instant they were released, for terror pricked his wits into working overtime. Any boy found with an egg was doomed to perish—and his training squad was bound to have many eggs left! Stealthily he collected those fluttering mortals, each with his incriminating evidence. Which evidence he bade them dispose of immediately.

Willett was the first to see the difficulty. He pointed out that to get rid of three or four dozen eggs in a few minutes without leaving any trace was easier said than done. For the insides of eggs, he explained, are sticky. If they smashed them they'd probably make a mess of the study and themselves; and also they must wrap up the squishy result, and although Benskin's shirt was the very thing for the wrapping, wherever could they hide such an oozy parcel?

But Bullock's wits put in some of their brightest work.

"You miserable little maggots, you must crack

them and suck them. Nobody can spot the eggs in your tummies. Corporal Willett ? ”

“ Yes, Bullock ? ”

“ You will swallow the shells.”

Willett protested that the coats of his stomach were tender. “ They always have been,” he moaned, “ since I was a kid.”

“ All right. You shall wrap the shells up in your handkerchief. Shells are clean enough,” conceded the trainer.

When Benskin Minor, who had twelve eggs left, had been dragged from hiding underneath the table, the squad began to swallow away for dear life. Nothing was audible save the cracking of shells ; the sucking of six desperate pairs of lips ; the gurgle and *glug-glug* in larynx and throat as white and yolk slid softly into concealment ; and their trainer’s booming notes of encouragement. Willett finished first, but the others were finishing, and even Benskin had demolished nearly half of his heap, when the door abruptly opened and the Head entered.

One glance was more than enough. They were caught yellow-handed.

Vainly Bullock stammered his explanation. Motioning Willett to follow, the Head marched him off to come and tell his story before Mr. Eggett.

But first he had searched the room with terrible eyes. And Benskin, with cheeks inflated and head

well back, had been taken in the act of swallowing his largest.

"And I want the boy Benskin?" the Head added.

But Benskin had vanished.

III

Mr. Eggett had returned to his room in a mood of absolute dejection. With such a digestion as his, life seemed hardly worth living. Everything was awry. His golf was in pieces. The sales of *Eggett on Surds* had begun to drop. And now the School had descended to robbing hen-roosts!

He poured himself a gloomy dose of Digesto, and eyed the bubbling draught with vacant gaze. His boys had sunk to stealing chickens . . . no, hens . . . prize hens, that were trying to hatch pennies. The world had gone off its head. Hens hatching pennies! He supposed they hatched them into sixpenny bits.

Mr. Eggett started and fingered his beard while the faintest of smiles crept to his drawn, pinched features. This was the first time he had smiled for four days; the first time he remembered smiling since Sparrow had gone.

Three French pennies! Where had he seen three French pennies?

Was a silent message being sent to him? . . .

His medicine glass was arrested on its way to

his mouth. "But it's impossible! It's incredible!" he breathed.

He was sitting thus and staring into vacancy when the Head burst in with his brace of captives. And Mr. Eggett uttered no word of comment while Bullock offered his halting explanation. All the time his thoughts appeared to be somewhere else; but he sat up with a jerk when the Head inquired what he thought of such a cock-and-bull story? "Bullock's motive," he heard the Head arguing, "is palpable. He stole to sell the proceeds at fourpence each."

"But that hardly," sighed Mr. Eggett, "accounts for the hen."

"A boy who will pilfer eggs will purloin fowls."

"Well, he might," agreed Mr. Eggett. "And—er—the bad pennies?"

"Bullock's very feeble idea of a joke."

Then Mr. Eggett rose and, re-corking his physic, restored it to its place with a shrug of his shoulders. "I believe, sir," he said quietly, "that Bullock's telling the truth. I believe he is the victim of—er—circumstance. If you will do no more in this matter till I report to you again, I believe I can clear it up. Will you leave it to me?"

Mr. Games stared. "Dismiss the boys when they reassemble?"

"Yes, sir. Let them go to their classes as usual. But permit me, if you will, to keep Bullock and Willett."

"I shall trust you," the Head said sharply, "not to lose sight of them. Very well, Eggett. Have it your own way."

Mr. Eggett thanked him, and as soon as they were alone, took his hat and stick, and commanding the two to follow, led them without a word down the avenue. They went in bewilderment. They marked a new briskness about him and a lilt in his step; his shoulders were drooping less, and his dull eyes had brightened. He was even humming a gay little air to himself.

Taking Bullock and Palethorpe's way of two days ago, he crossed the stile, but, nearing the wire netting, he turned to the right. "Now," he said, "the Head told us just now that Benskin was with you when you were caught—er—concealing your eggs?"

Bullock grinned feeble assent. Benskin *was* sucking eggs.

"And Benskin disappeared? He made a bolt?"

"Yes, sir," cried Willett.

"Well, boys, I'm about to do some exploring. You two wait here a moment and keep out of sight."

He left them with blank gazes for each other, and, gaining the lane, approached the tall hedge of stiff holly which encloses the right corner of Abel's premises. And as he drew near the hedge he saw something singular. For either his eyes

played tricks, or at the base of the holly he glimpsed two legs and that part of a boy's frame which would display itself, not unprominently, were its owner wriggling through the hedge on his stomach. And, seemingly, it belonged to a fat boy in Etons.

Uttering a little cry, Mr. Eggett ran forward and lashed at the prominent object with his stick. He was just too late.

The hedge was too high to see over ; too thick to break through ; and the holly had sprung back where it had been parted. He tried to peer through, but it pricked his face and he could distinguish nothing. So literally without beating about this bush, he retraced his steps to his two assistants, and brought them back to the spot and showed it to them.

" Willett," he said, " you are the smallest of the three. Squeeze yourself through there and be quick about it ! "

Willett eyed the hedge doubtfully. " It pricks, sir ! " he whimpered.

" It does," agreed Mr. Eggett, with his handkerchief to his cheek. " But I've a notion Benskin is somewhere the other side. Wriggle through, and see if you can find him. Bring him back if you can. We'll wait for you here."

" But please, sir ! " Willett repeated plaintively. " It pricks ! "

Mr. Eggett handling one leg and Bullock the other, they pushed him through head first where

Benskin had gone. They heard him call, "Right, sir! I'm through!" and scamper ahead. They waited for twenty-five minutes, but no Willett returned.

"Dear, dear!" Mr. Eggett sighed and fingered his beard. "Bullock, this is mysterious. Could you see over?"

But Bullock could not make jumps because of his knee.

Then Mr. Eggett tried, leaping and craning; but crane and stretch as he might, the tall hedge defied him. All he did was nearly to break his glasses. So, dabbing his bleeding cheek, he eyed his companion.

"Bullock, I'm afraid there's nothing else for it. You must go."

"Sir," said Bullock gruffly, "trust me to barge through!" He confronted the hedge as he'd confronted many a packed scrum. "And when I've barged my way through, sir, I'll pull you after me."

"You will not," Mr. Eggett said, very decisively.

"Then what must I do, sir?"

"See what's happened, of course, to those two boys. Follow them. Find them. And come back and report to me."

"Suppose I can't find them, sir?"

"I shall wait here for half an hour at least. If you're not back by then I shall leave you to do

your best and shall pursue my inquiries in another direction. But you're sure to find them, Bullock, and bring them back. I fancy that Benskin is—er—the clue to our search."

Bullock hurled his weight at the spot where the others had gone, screening his face with his arms while he grunted and thrust. The holly rasped and stung. But it gave to his hefty assault.

"A useful game, Rugger!" Mr. Eggett ejaculated.

As the minutes sped but brought no Bullock, the sense of mystery pricked him more and more. In half an hour it had risen to sharp anxiety, and anxiety in turn became active alarm. What secret lay the other side of that hedge? What was lurking there to swallow his messengers thus? He raised his voice and called; but no voice responded.

For forty minutes or so the distracted man waited; racking his wits and very loth to be beaten. Somehow or other he must get through and see for himself. He had begun to measure the hedge with savage defiance, assessing it, so to speak, and buttoning his coat, when a cart rumbled down the lane and resolved his dilemma. For a shilling the carter agreed to help him over; and—with a leer—"to say nothin' about it, Mister."

Mr. Eggett could not leer; but he did his best. Not for worlds would he have disclosed to this

chawbacon that three of his boys had forced their way through that hedge! So accepting a position highly equivocal for a Mathematical Master of stainless character, he climbed painfully up on the cart and was aided across. Deeds requiring considerably less moral courage have been paraded to admiration in history.

Having alighted on all fours on the other side, and jarred in every limb, he stared about him. He saw a footpath rounding the farmer's pigsties and diving across the sunk road to Little Hay Common.

Three solutions of the mystery presented themselves. The vanished had either been captured by Mr. Abel, or (2) devoured by his pigs, or (3) had met with some accident on the Common. Reflecting that he was shaken enough already without the further storm and stress of debate with Abel, he decided to explore the Common first, and hurried his harassed way onward, gravely concerned.

Nothing was stirring among the furze and dwarf bushes. A bird took fright at his footsteps and rose with a clatter; a wandering sow lifted its snout from its rooting and surveyed him indifferently; a round, charred patch, where someone had lighted a fire, confronted him with a litter of paper and rubbish. But other signs of human existence were none.

Nonplussed and bewildered, he stopped to look

helplessly around ; steadily searching every point of the compass. And he marked how picturesquely the sun was setting above the mellowed red brick of the Infants' Schools.

Beauty always enchanted Mr. Eggett, so he stood for some time watching this pleasing effect, till it seemed to him of a sudden that a spiral of vapour was curling from the chimney of the derelict cottage of the Schoolmistress. He removed his glasses and wiped them ; then stared intently. Could it be smoke that was issuing from the chimney ?

Gripping his stick, he strode off to investigate.

He went with the greatest caution ; as a man might stalk deer.

Reaching the cottage, he raised the latch noiselessly, and tip-toed towards the direction of cheerful voices which, with the sharp crackle of firewood, served as a guide. They guided him to the kitchen. He stopped at the door. And as the door had long since dropped from its hinges, it scarcely served to hide what it should have hidden.

Without a movement, Mr. Eggett surveyed the scene.

This scene was charmingly, if strangely, domestic. At other times it might have reminded its observer of some interior limned by a Dutch artist, or one of Landseer's drawings of the huntsman returned. The fading light which stole through the leaded panes, each a little diamond

lozenge, but curtained no longer, illuminated the stooping figure of Willett feeding a flickering fire with sweet-smelling furze. And behind him hovered Bullock, no longer truculent, but engaged in the homely task of paring potatoes.

Squatting on the floor, and somewhat in the shadow, was another figure surrounded by feathers; and this at first glance was not so easily distinguishable. But presently it resolved itself into Benskin, struggling to pluck a large and deceased yellow hen.

Clad in a labourer's smock several times too large for him, and carrying a saucer and loaf of bread, there emerged that instant from the scullery the form of Thomas Whitcombe Shirley Sparrow.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Eggett, "I thought I should find you!"

On their way back they ran into Farmer Abel, who was crinkling something in his horny hand.

"See this!" he shouted boisterously to Mr. Eggett. "My hens have just begun to lay one pound notes!"

"Thank you, Mr. Abel," lisped Sparrow, demurely. But the farmer had gone, on excellent terms with himself.

IV

"I suppose," Mr. Eggett was saying to Sparrow that evening, "I suppose you calculated that

BRITAIN

Mr. Abel would bring the French pennies up to the School, so you put them in the nests as—er—a message to me?”

Sparrow's first reply was a sidewise glance. “Sir,” he said next—and his voice was a little wistful—“the proverb says that bad pennies always turn up.”

Mr. Eggett's only comment was a sniff. But presently he remarked: “So you've been hiding in the cottage four days?”

“Living on eggs, sir; and bread that young Benskin brought. I sent him a letter telling him where to find me. Eggs, sir!” Sparrow's somewhat peaked face wryly puckered itself. “I never want to look at an egg again!”

“No more, I fancy,” Mr. Eggett said dryly, “does Bullock.”

“So I had to go for that rooster, sir. I was starving.”

“But what possessed you, Sparrow, to play such a trick?”

“It wasn't a trick, sir. I had nowhere to go. My people are abroad and our house is shut up. I knew that all the time when the Head said he had written home; but I thought, sir,”—Sparrow smiled—“he'd be annoyed if I told him. His letters will be chasing my father round the Continent.”

“But after the paperchase the Headmaster wired to your father.”

"The post-office wouldn't be instructed to send telegrams on, sir. That telegram will be still in the letter-box at home."

"Very likely," sighed Mr. Eggett. "We ought to have made sure."

"So, sir," Sparrow said eagerly, "what could I do? All I could do was to pop out at the next station, and come back . . . to the next best school I could find. I hadn't enough money for hotels."

"Then why not come straight back here, and tell us about it?"

"Well, I did go back to a *School*, sir; didn't I, sir?"

Mr. Eggett sniffed again. "And your box went on?"

"Sir, I hope it's as happy in the lost luggage office as I've been on the Common, except for the eggs." Sparrow cocked his head on one side, and stood very still, searching his old friend's face with an odd expression. And Mr. Eggett was the first to break a long silence.

"Supposing, Sparrow, that I should have told the Headmaster that school life has at last begun to attract you? Supposing I should have urged that at last you realize how capital a time one can have at school? Supposing I have said this—did I say right?"

Over Sparrow's desolate features a great joy swept. It welled and sparkled in every note of his voice.

"Sir, I should just hate to be expelled now. I'm having far too topping a time at Castle-gate!"

"Yes, I imagined so," Mr. Eggett sighed. "Well, I may tell you. The Headmaster has, most generously, reconsidered your case. And he has decided to keep you, to see what we can make of you." And now at last a smile was hovering also behind the grave curtain of the Old Egg's eyes. "Bad pennies, as you remarked, Sparrow, always turn up."

He rose, and taking his bottle of medicine, opened the window and tossed the contents away.

"I am feeling," he observed, "considerably better."

THE END

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